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# Sea Swallow

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# Sea

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Swallow-tailed Gull, Galapagos  
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The Society was formed in 1946 to provide a forum for the exchange of information on seabirds, and land birds at sea, by members for whom birdwatching is a spare time recreation and hobby. It also aims to coordinate the efforts of individual members using standardised recording methods so that observations can be of value to the professional ornithologist. In addition to the promotion of observations afloat, the RNBS organises fieldwork and expeditions, often in cooperation with the Army and RAF Ornithological Societies.

The Royal Naval Birdwatching Society is the only organisation in the world which collects, collates and publishes data on seabirds and landbirds at sea. Membership is open to all those, regardless of nationality, who share a common interest in birds at sea. Instructions for joining can be found on the Society website [www.rnbs.org.uk](http://www.rnbs.org.uk) or by application to the Secretary.

**Subscription Rates:** Members living in the UK £15; £20 for those living elsewhere. Subscriptions are due on 1 January and may be Gift Aided. Library rates: £15 plus postage (UK); £20 plus postage (outside UK).

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**Material for publication** in *Sea Swallow* should be sent to the editor. Ideally submissions should be in MS Word or rtf format, but other formats are acceptable. Graphics should be jpeg or tiff. Accompanying photographs sent electronically should always be the original camera files, and not cropped in any way. Contributions are welcome at any time, but if for inclusion in the next edition should reach the editor by 30 July.

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# Chairman's Foreword

by Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster

This year's issue of *Sea Swallow* is as always a good one but it also marks something of a pivot point in the balance of our journal's raison d'être. I say this not to spread alarm amongst seasoned readers but by way of a note that computerized record-keeping allows us to make changes. So where, in the early days, *Sea Swallow* was primarily a list of seabird records with some articles added for interest, it is now chiefly a set of articles - including of course those which draw attention to highlights in the year's records - as the records themselves are held and promulgated electronically. The achievement of this owes much to the work of Stephen Chapman who has enabled us to have both a more useful database and a more readable magazine.

As to the articles, there is the usual global coverage, ranging from the Atlantic and West Indies to the Indian Ocean, Hong Kong and the South American shores of the Pacific. We also report on the end of an era, with an account of the last voyage of a Royal Mail Ship, RMS *St Helena* - a ship always known on the Atlantic island sea routes not by her name but simply as *The RMS*. But to me, the most heartwarming article is the short piece by Bill Bourne on his life of seabird study; no person has done more for *Sea Swallow* and RNBWS.

Amongst administrative matters, I am pleased to report that the Committee has done some valuable housework in updating the Constitution for the Society. Whilst not a major change, the revised document does now reflect properly what we aim to do. For enthusiasts in this sort of thing, it is available for perusal on the RNBWS website. Another, less welcome if understandable change, is that Dr Russell Wynn has stepped down after 13 years as our Seabird Adviser, due to pressure of his other commitments as Director of the National Oceanographic Centre. We have been grateful for his contributions over these years and hope he will allow us to stay in touch.

And finally, I am sad to report the death of one of our members, James King (Hamish) Currie. Captain Currie lived in Largs and was formerly a master with Clan Line Shipping, a period during which he joined the Society. He kept up his interest in sea birds in later life and was generous enough to leave the RNBWS a significant bequest from his estate. This is much appreciated and will be put to good use in his memory amongst our conservation projects.

**Martin Alabaster**

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**Plate 1.** Geoff Jones on deck photographing seabirds.

# Seabirds of the Humboldt Current, 23 October to 16 November 2017

by John & Jemi Holmes

(Photographs by the authors)

My wife Jemi and I embarked on a voyage on the eighteen-metre yacht *Sauvage* through the northern part of the Humboldt Current from north Chile to the Galapagos Islands from 23 October to 16 November 2017. The *Sauvage* was professionally sailed by its owners Didier and Sophie Wattreloot, the trip was initiated and organised by Kirk Zufelt and our other companions were Mike Danzenbaker, Geoff Jones and Rob Tizard. The attraction of seeing and photographing eastern pacific seabirds was irresistible to all of us.

The Humboldt Current is a cold current flowing north along the whole west coast of South America. The cold, nutrient rich water supports an abundance of marine life including fish, marine mammals and seabirds. We started our journey along the Humboldt from the port of Arica in the very north of Chile on 23 October. When still in Arica port we practiced our photography skills with Inca Terns *Larosterna inca* and - rather more easily - Peruvian Pelicans *Pelecanus thagus*, while we waited for the Chilean Immigration Officials to stamp our passports “Departed”.

**Plate 2 a–h (overleaf).** **a)** Inca Tern. **b)** Peruvian Booby. **c)** Peruvian Diving Petrel. **d)** Peruvian Pelican. **e)** Chilean Skua. **f)** Elliot’s Storm-petrel. **g)** Peruvian Tern. **h)** Elliot’s and Wilson’s Storm-petrels with Northern Giant Petrel.

a)



b)



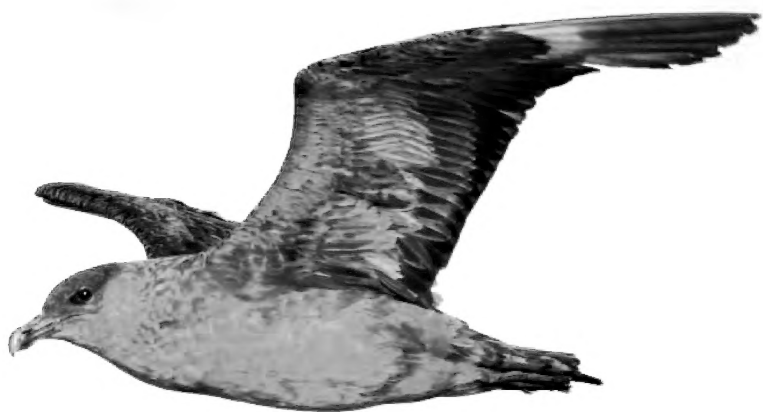
c)



d)



e)



f)



g)



h)



On leaving port, we soon encountered Peruvian Boobies *Sula variegata*, a Peruvian Diving Petrel *Pelecanoides garnotii*, Chilean Skuas *Catharacta chilensis* and a small party of the very localised Peruvian Tern *Sternula lorata*.

By late afternoon on day one, about 12km from the coast, we came across a decaying sea lion carcass, attended by a flock of 25–30 Storm-Petrels, mostly Elliot's *Oceanites gracilis* but with a few Wilson's *Oceanites oceanicus* among them, and a single Northern Giant Petrel *Macronectes halli*.

We drifted around near the storm-petrels, trying to get shots that didn't show too much of the dead sea lion. An alien presence was noted in the air - a Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*. It swooped towards us and took one of the Storm-petrels from the surface of the water. The Peregrine was so quick that that the other birds didn't seem to notice that one of their number was missing.

Forty minutes later, in the fading light, the Peregrine did it again.

We were 30km offshore by dawn the following day. Overcast and cool, the effect of the cold-water Humboldt Current was keenly felt. We had our first views of Markham's Storm-petrels *Oceanodroma markhami* and made our first sightings of Swallow-tailed Gulls *Creagrus furcatus* as well as many Sooty Shearwaters *Puffinus griseus* and a single Pink-footed Shearwater *Puffinus creatopus*.

**Plate 3 (below).** Elliot's Storm-petrel. **Plate 4 a–b (opposite).** a) Peregrine with storm-petrel prey. b) Peregrine taking storm-petrel prey. **Plate 5 a–h (overleaf).** a) Markham's Storm-Petrel. b) Swallow-tailed Gull. c) Pink-footed Shearwater. d) Sooty Shearwater. e) Elegant Tern. f) Elegant Tern with Pomarine Skua. g) South American Tern. h) Long-tailed Skua.





a)



b)



a)



b)



c)



d)



e)



f)



g)



h)



The morning fog cleared around midday, a weather pattern often repeated during the trip. Temperatures on board were cool but comfortable, and we all settled into spending lots of time on deck.

There were terns, including Elegant *Thalasseus elegans*, South American *Sterna hirundinacea*, and Inca, with regular appearances of skuas - Long-tailed *Stercorarius longicaudus* and Pomarine *S. pomarinus* to harry them.

A daytime drip of fish oil meant that we were never without a following of storm-petrels in the wake of the *Sauvage*, with the species of storm-petrel varying as the route progressed. We started out with mostly Elliot's but later there were more Wedge-rumped *Oceanodroma tethys*.

Hornby's (Ringed) *Oceanodroma hornbyi* and Black *O. melania* Storm-petrels were encountered, but these never followed the boat.

Early in the trip, off southern Peru, we noted some southern ocean seabirds, including Buller's Albatross *Thalassarche bulleri* and White-chinned Petrels *Procellaria aequinoctialis*, the petrels showing varyingly small amounts of white chin.

We saw a few De Filippi's (Masatierra) Petrels *Pterodroma defilippiana*, our first pterodromas of the trip. They breed on islands off the mid-Chilean coast.

**Plate 6 (below).** Wedge-rumped Storm-petrel. **Plate 7 a-e (opposite).** a) Hornby's Storm-petrel. b) Buller's Albatross. c) White-chinned Petrel. d) Black Storm-petrel. e) Hornby's Storm-petrel. **Plate 8 a-h (overleaf).** a) Masatierra Petrel. b) Hawksbill Turtle. c) Common Dolphin. d) Waved Albatross. e) Leach's Storm-petrel. f) Band-rumped Storm-petrel. g) Swallow-tailed Gull. h) Blue-footed Booby.





c)



d)



e)











A large pod of Short-beaked Common Dolphins *Delphinus delphis* provided some mid-voyage entertainment, as well as a Hawksbill Sea Turtle *Eretmochelys imbricata*.

Eight days into our journey we had our first views of Waved Albatross *Diomedea irrorata*, a breeding endemic of Espanola in the Galapagos, but a few also breed on Isla de la Plata near Guayaquil in mainland Ecuador. The albatrosses would fly up from the wake of the *Sauvage* and land, expectantly, beside the boat. If they thought the yacht was a trawler, they would have been disappointed at the absence of fish.

Other wide-ranging Galapagos breeders were Blue-footed Booby *Sula nebouxii* and Swallow-tailed Gulls, the latter here captured in a night-time photo. Nocturnal hunters of squid, Swallow-tailed Gulls have a bat-like rattling contact call. This shot was taken with a high ISO and by torchlight.

The numbers of Elliot's Storm-petrels dropped as we headed away from the South American mainland, and the proportion of Wedge-rumped Storm-petrels increased in mid-passage until they were the commonest storm-petrel in the wake. Hornby's Storm-petrels appeared in ones and twos. Occasionally the Wedge-rumped flock in the wake was interrupted by two other storm-petrel species, Leach's *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* and Band-rumped (Madeiran) *O. castro*, neither of which lingered for long.

Frigatebirds started to appear, both Magnificent *Fregata magnificens*, photographed with a Nazca Booby *Sula Granti*, and Great *F. minor*.

Finally, we started to get regular appearances of Galapagos Petrels *Pterodroma phaeopygia* and Galapagos Shearwaters *Puffinus subalaris*. Many avoided the boat, or were seen in poor light, but we got better photos as the days passed.

A big pod of Short-finned Pilot Whales *Globicephala macrorhynchus* provided our main cetacean excitement. There had been other sightings of whales and dolphins, but these Pilot Whales were right beside the boat at one stage.

One late-trip afternoon in the sunshine gave us a chance to improve our storm-petrel portfolios, and both Elliot's and Wedge-rumped were on view.

On 16th November, 24 days after the voyage began, the *Sauvage* arrived at the port of Puerto Ayora, on Santa Cruz in the Galapagos Islands. There was a whole range of seabirds in the harbour, from Elliot's Storm-petrels to Magnificent Frigatebirds.... but our voyage was over.

Thanks again to Didier and Sophie Wattrelo of the yacht *Sauvage* for safely looking after us, and to Kirk Zufelt, Mike Danzenbaker, Geoff Jones and Rob Tizard for their entertaining company during the trip.

**John and Jemi Holmes**  
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# Watching birds at sea

by Dr WRP Bourne

*Long-term members of RNBWS will be aware of Bill Bourne's immense contribution to the Society, to Sea Swallow, and most of all to the study of seabirds.*

**Plate 10.** The author. © S Bourne



first world war. When I was small my three maiden aunts introduced me to the birds and their nests in their large garden, and these fascinated me, and birds became part of my world. When I was seven father introduced me to egg-collecting as a suitable activity for boys, and I collected them enthusiastically for ten years until it dawned on me that it was not respectable, so I smashed them (the most notable a thin peregrine egg taken on the Second Sister in 1947, the first year of the use of DDT on farms), and joined the British Trust for Ornithology instead.

In 1940 father had sent the family to Bermuda to avoid the war, and mother then sent my brother and me to Canada for the winter, which was not a great success, but highly educational, giving me a mid-Atlantic outlook. We returned to Bermuda until the whole family came home in 1944, and during this time I got to know boats and seabirds, and the contrasting breeding behaviour of tropicbirds and terns. I continued watching birds in a general way until I saw them on radar during my National Service as an RAF medical officer in Cyprus in 1948, and David Lack at the Edward Grey Institute in Oxford then offered me an opportunity to do this in north-east Scotland.

Here I became concerned at the threat oil pollution posed for seabirds, and with George Dunnet of Aberdeen University founded the Seabird Group to study them. This led to another post there looking at the seabird situation around the north of Scotland from patrol vessels, followed by a post as ship's doctor to do the same sort of things on a larger scale serving on board Royal Fleet Auxiliaries (which wait on the Royal Navy), including five voyages to the South Atlantic and three to the Arabian Sea (unfortunately

they no longer went to the Pacific). Appointments tended to last six months followed by six months' leave to make up for lost week-ends, and I was still attached to Aberdeen University, where initiative was better appreciated than at Oxford.

When I started watching birds seabirds were mostly counted on or from the shore, and reported alongside the local landbirds, or during individual voyages, with little general analysis. There was little understanding that there were distinct winter and summer communities, where the situation might change as the birds matured, so that their distribution appearance and behaviour varied with the season, the area, and the age of the birds. Thus the long immature birds may be comparatively seldom seen in the breeding areas, and mature ones in the winter quarters in summer.

Bird behaviour may also change with the season; the marsh terns and phalaropes breed inland but winter offshore, some gulls may breed inland and winter around water, or breed on the coast and winter inland. Most auks winter at sea, and some seabirds carry out vast migrations across continents and oceans, sometimes between the eastern and western or northern and southern hemispheres, which may or may not be over the sea or land, though all nest on land except the southern Emperor Penguins, which may carry their egg on their feet on ice.

When I became a medical student at Cambridge I continued watching birds, and ended with a grand student bird-watching expedition to the Cape Verde Islands off West Africa. Afterwards I looked for information on the rich seabird community of that area, which had been generally overlooked, and found that the best source was Captain Gerald Tuck, chairman of the Royal Naval Bird Watching Society, set up to continue work started during World War II. We continued corresponding, and I became their adviser, summarising observations in their annual report, *Sea Swallow*, which has now become among other things the Learned Journal for the subject.

It is debatable how to develop seabird studies. It is difficult to count birds at sea and relate the results to area owing to such factors as the visibility, weather, angle of view, light, and distance, but the results in different areas can be compared. Totals tend to be greatest in areas where rivers bring nutrients to the sea, or turbulence and upwelling bring them to the surface, leading to a growth of plankton and dependent marine life. The situation is complicated by the way that some birds tend to follow ships and some do not, and some birds feed more in daylight and others when marine organisms come to the surface at night, but again different areas and stomach contents can be compared.

This of course requires vast amounts of investigation to cover all seabirds throughout the year in all the oceans. The analysis of such data presents problems, only recently reduced by the advent of computer-processing, which still requires further development. So far, the information shows roughly whether seabirds feed ashore, inshore or offshore, on what, in what areas, and how they move with age and the seasons. Much more uniform information is required to fill in the details at sea, and the organisation to provide and process it does not yet exist. What is required is an organisation and base to collect and process this information; it is sad and a serious loss that the late Professor George Dunnet at Aberdeen University, who was providing it, has now left us.

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Plate 11. Little Tobago.

## Bosun birds of Little Tobago

by Tim & Jane Barton

(Photographs by Jane Barton)

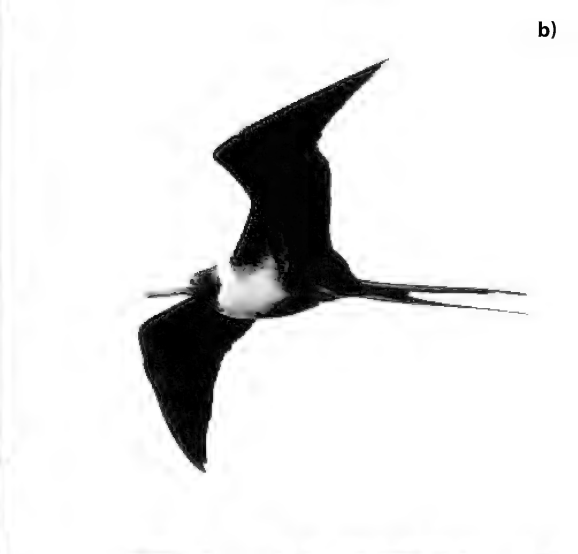
In January 2018 we visited Tobago for two weeks; one week in a lodge on the edge of the rain forest (and my, how it did rain!), looking at and photographing birds, especially hummingbirds, and a second at a resort in the village of Speyside on the north east coast. From there we did a day visit to Little Tobago Island, just a short boat trip away, and here we hoped to photograph Red-billed Tropicbirds *Phaethon aethereus* as well as see some of the thirty or so other species that breed there.



Plate 12. Little Tobago landing.

This island, which is also known as Bird of Paradise Island, is small (113 hectares), star-shaped and mountainous and now is one of the most important seabird sanctuaries in the Caribbean. In the latter half of the 18th century it was a cotton plantation of some significance, outdoing the rest of Tobago in its yield per acre. Later, sugar cane was attempted around the turn of the century when the cotton industry collapsed, but the island was eventually abandoned as it proved unsuitable.

Plate 13 a–f (opposite). **a)** Ruddy Turnstone. **b)** Immature Magnificent Frigatebird. **c)** Brown Pelican. **d)** Southern Plover. **e)** Spotted Sandpiper. **f)** Red-footed Booby. **Plate 14 a–f (overleaf).** Red-billed Tropicbirds.



a)



b)



c)







Plate 15. White-tailed sabrewing Hummingbird.

In 1909 the island was bought by Sir William Ingram who introduced a colony of Birds of Paradise *family paradisaeidae*. These birds were imported from New Guinea where a thriving plume trade threatened them with extinction. On Sir William's death in 1924 the island was presented to the government of Trinidad and Tobago on the condition that it be maintained as a bird sanctuary.

The Birds of Paradise survived on Little Tobago until they were finally wiped out by hurricane Flora in 1963. Today the island is open to day visitors only, is free from cats and rats, and is an important breeding site for sea birds such as Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri*, Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* and Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* - and of course, our main focus, the Red-billed Tropicbird, or to use its common name in those parts, the Bosun bird.

After our short boat journey we had a steep climb up from the landing site through the forest to a clearing and observation point at the top of the island. Here we came across numbers of Magnificent Frigatebirds *Fregata magnificens* lurking in wait to rob tropicbirds of their catches, while around swirled Red-billed Tropicbirds and further out Red-footed Boobies.

In and around Little Tobago we also saw numbers of Brown Pelican *Pelicanus occidentalis*, several waders, and a fish-carrying Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*.

In short, a great day out!

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**Plate 16.** Part of the Greater Crested Tern breeding colony at Grand Polyte, Cosmoledo Atoll, Seychelles. In the background, a sparse group of Red-footed Boobies roosting on *Pernis ptilorhynchus*. © A Quatre

# First population estimate of breeding Greater Crested Tern on Cosmoledo Atoll, Seychelles

by Josep Nogués (Lead author), Ariadna Fernández, Alex Quatre & Adrian Skerrett

This paper reports the discovery of one of the most important breeding sites for Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* in Seychelles: Cosmoledo Atoll. This colony, now estimated at about 234 breeding pairs, has sometimes been reported by residents or visitors to Cosmoledo but without supporting details. It is now confirmed for the first time. Although ecotourism is not fully developed in the atoll, access to the colony should be strictly regulated.

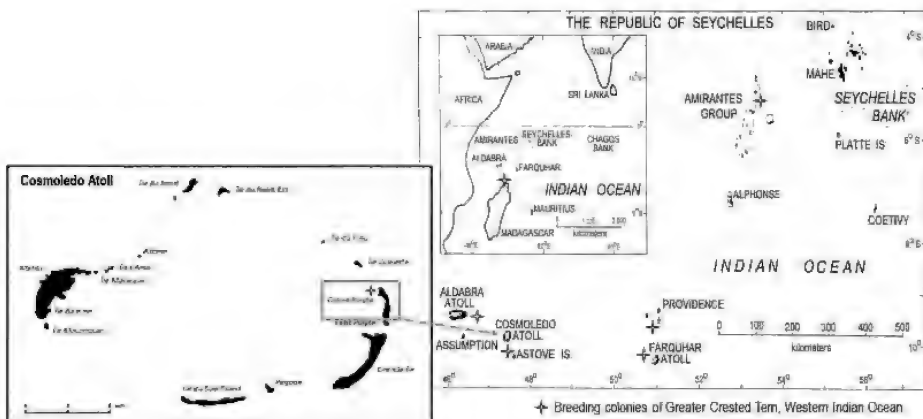
The Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* is a large, graceful tern with a tropical and subtropical distribution. The species is resident on islands and coastlines of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf out to the Atlantic coast of South Africa and Namibia, and across the Indian Ocean and central Pacific to the Society Islands with race *thalassinus* in the western Indian Ocean (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). Race *velox* (breeding on Red Sea coasts) has also been recorded as a visitor to the region by the Seychelles Bird Records Committee (Skerrett *et al.* 2017). Terns are colonial breeders, and monogamous pair-bond species, and do not occupy nesting sites until the breeding season. The species is listed as 'Least Concern' by IUCN (IUCN 2016) and its global population is estimated to number c. 150,000–1,100,000 individuals (Wetlands International 2006).

In Seychelles, the species has one or two laying periods: December–January and June–August, with successful breeders probably missing the next breeding period and returning to breed in a 12-month cycle (Skerrett 2013). Breeding has been confirmed at seven islets of Aldabra (Diamond and Prŷs-Jones 1986), Etoile (Dawson 1966, Skerrett 2016a), African Banks (Vesey-Fitzgerald 1941, Feare 1979), Providence Atoll (Stoddart 1967, Diamond and Prŷs-Jones 1986, Skerrett 2016), and Farquhar (2001 photographic evidence, Duhec *et al.* 2017). The species may still breed within the Amirantes group, where decent numbers of adults well-accompanied by begging juveniles are often reported by the staff of the Island Conservation Society (i.e. Desroches, Poivre, St. Joseph and Alphonse) (ICS archive). Rocamora 2013 suggested that a minimum of 50 pairs continue to breed in the northern Amirantes due to ornithological observations at Boudeuse, Etoile and African Banks in November 2013. However, there has been no ornithological visit to Etoile during the breeding season (possibly the main breeding site) for more than 50 years (Dawson 1966). The species formerly bred and may also breed now at Astove (Bayne *et al.* 1970), and has been speculated to breed in the lagoon islets of Cosmoledo (possibly up to 100 pairs; Skerrett 2016), where the species is commonly encountered, but without supporting evidence of breeding.

Outside the breeding season, Greater Crested Terns can be found at sea throughout this range, with the exception of the central Indian Ocean (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). It is its wide dispersal and the fact that the species is fairly common throughout Seychelles all year round that suggest that some breeding colonies remain to be discovered (Skerrett, 2016).

The Seychelles population of Greater Crested Tern as a whole has been estimated at 310–650 pairs (Skerrett 2016). This total includes a presumed 0–100 pairs on Cosmoledo.

The most important breeding colony of Greater Crested Tern of the all-Western Indian Ocean is at Nosy Foty on the west coast of Madagascar, *c.* 30 km to the west of Antsiranana, with *c.* 10,840 pairs (Le Corre *et al.* 2009). This colony is situated less than 400 km south-east of Cosmoledo Atoll (9.7S, 47.6E), the second largest atoll of the Aldabra group, *c.* 120 km east of Aldabra Atoll, 700 km east of Africa and 1,000 km south-west of Mahé, Seychelles. Three breeding colonies are known to exist at the vicinity of Cosmoledo Atoll. The largest in Seychelles, Bancs de



**Figure 1.** Map of the Western Indian Ocean showing the important localities mentioned in the text; Madagascar, Cosmoledo Atoll, Aldabra Atoll, Bancs de Providence and Farquhar, Seychelles (right); and detail of Cosmoledo Atoll with Grand Polyte framed in red (left).

Providence, is estimated at 200–300 pairs (Skerrett 2016), the Aldabra colonies up to 40 pairs (Diamond and Prŷs-Jones 1986) and Bancs de Sable in Farquhar with about 2–4 pairs (Duhec *et al.* 2017).

Cosmoledo is an outstanding biodiversity hotspot in Seychelles. Despite being unprotected, the numbers of seabirds found breeding at the atoll are of international importance (i.e. the largest Booby colony of Seychelles and one of the largest Sooty Tern colonies of the Western Indian Ocean), and as a result Cosmoledo is an Important Bird Area (Rocamora & Skerrett 2001).

On 19 February 2018, Alex Quatre, as fly-fishing guide for the Alphonse Fishing Company, visited the uninhabited island of Grand Polyte, on the East rim of Cosmoledo. He filmed from a distance an entire breeding colony of Greater Crested Terns. The film was used as a method to describe the first documented record of Greater Crested Tern breeding on Cosmoledo Atoll, record numbers and breeding site characteristics. In this way, 234 pairs of Greater Crested Terns were counted nesting on Grand Polyte. There was a minimum of 230 pairs sitting on eggs with at least 40 downy chicks ageing mostly C1 and C2. Terns were nesting on an open sandy area mostly covered with coral rubble mixed with small patches of dead seagrass. The site was surrounded by sparse low stands of *Suriana maritima* and *Scaevola taccada* and larger shrubs of *Pemphis acidula* dominating the area at the east side of the island. Nests, a shallow scrape in the ground with no nesting material, were irregularly spaced. Based on the observation that most Greater Crested Terns were with eggs and that the majority of chicks observed were ageing an early C2, and knowing that the species has a 25–30 days incubation period (Skerrett 2013), we estimated that the laying dates were at least from beginning of January. In addition, only one unsuccessful mating attempt was reported when analyzing the film in detail.

Cats and rats were eradicated from Grand Polyte by Island Conservation Society (ICS) in November 2007 (Rocamora 2007), and both were proved positively to be absent in 2014 (Pinchart *et al.* 2015). This success not only has benefited the establishment of the Greater Crested Terns on Grand Polyte, it has also favoured other colonial breeders, and terrestrial ground/shrub/tree nesting seabirds like Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*), Red-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon rubricauda*) and Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*).

Breeding success is poorly known in the region but elsewhere productivity is 0–0.6 per nest (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). Cosmoledo Atoll is rarely visited by ornithologists, and some of the nineteen islands that form the atoll had never previously been surveyed, preventing any temporal analysis of population changes. We believe this is the first description of nesting, and thus the first substantiated breeding record, for Greater Crested Tern on Cosmoledo.

**Table 1.** Total Seychelles population of Greater Crested Tern 2018 (updated from Skerrett 2016).

Location	Population (pairs)	References
Aldabra	60–100	Diamond & Prŷs-Jones 1986, Rocamora & Skerrett 2001
Cosmoledo	234	This paper
Astove	Unknown, possibly 0–50	
Bancs Providence	200–300	Skerrett 2016
Northern Amirantes	c. 50–100	Dawson 1966, Feare 1979, Rocamora 2013
Farquhar	c. 4–6	Duhec A., Jeanne R. & Skerrett A. 2017
<b>Total</b>	<b>548–790 pairs</b>	<b>(1,644–2,370 birds as per wetlands international 2006)</b>



**Plate 17.** Detail of Greater Crested Tern colony at the colony of Grand Polyte, Cosmoledo. © A Quatre

In summary, we now know of four breeding populations of Greater Crested Tern throughout Seychelles with recent breeding on Astove and Northern Amirantes yet to be confirmed. The estimated total Seychelles population is raised significantly by 21.5% (upper limit) to 77% (lower limit).

Of the known sites, only Aldabra is properly protected (Etoile and African Banks also receive legal protection but as they are uninhabited this is ineffective and poaching of eggs is known to occur). The small colony at Farquhar is monitored by Island Conservation Society, but the importance of the other two areas must be addressed with more resources allocated for better monitoring and management. Cosmoledo has recently become a destination for fly-fishing operations and it is hoped that this activity will help to support the presence of an ICS Conservation Officer by way of a conservation levy on each visitor, a system already in operation at other islands of Seychelles. A foundation has been registered, Cosmoledo Foundation with trustees from ICS, Islands Development Company (island managers), tourism investors at Cosmoledo and Ministry of Environment.

Colonies are prone to human disturbance and adults will desert eggs and small chicks if approached, moving elsewhere to re-lay (Diamond and Prÿs-Jones 1986). Egg collection and disturbance at the tern colonies should be strictly prohibited. Meanwhile, conservation awareness and education work targeted at both local government and the fishermen are important. Fly-fishermen and other visitors to Cosmoledo must be requested to avoid visiting the one known colony and to be aware that in the event they discover any other colony it should be reported to Island Conservation Society.

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# Some seabirds of the west Indian Ocean (Seychelles, Mauritius and Reunion) 19–30 October 2017

by Dr Colin Rogers<sup>1</sup>

(Photographs by the author)

## Introduction

During October 2017 I participated in a ‘Birding Africa’ tour searching for endemic bird species on the islands of the west Indian Ocean<sup>2</sup>. During the tour we made two pelagic excursions, one off Round Island, Mauritius, and the other off south-east Reunion, engaged in sea-watching from shore on Seychelles and Reunion and visiting several seabird breeding colonies in the Seychelles.

The highlight of the tour for me was the sight of thousands of Barau’s Petrel *Pterodroma baraui* off the beaches of Reunion in the late afternoon and at sunset flying overhead to their colony high in the mountainous interior. That experience was closely followed in my ranking by the sight of some intriguing petrels off Round Island. As noted below, recent research on Round Island has interesting implications for *Pterodroma* taxonomy.

Unfortunately, we missed the recently re-recorded Mascarene Petrel *Pseudobulweria aterrima* on our single pelagic off Reunion. This experience suggests we were a little too early in the year. Shirihai (2014) and Flood (2015) document how to find this elusive species.

## Seychelles

The Seychelles consist of far too many islands and atolls for us to visit them all during this short trip. We focused on several of the easily accessible inner islands group: Mahe, Praslin, Cousin (a private island), La Digue and Aride. Best for seabirds were Cousin and Aride. On Cousin we had exceptionally close views of Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris* with Brown or Common Noddy *Anous stolidus*, White Tern *Gygis alba*, Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus*, Sooty Tern *O. fuscatus*, and breeding White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*.

Plate 18 a–c. Lesser Noddy, White Tern and Sooty Tern on Cousin Island, Seychelles, October 2017.



Arde provided me with close views of Tropical Shearwater *Puffinus bailloni*, and Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna pacificus*, in or near their burrows. A well-placed lookout provided spectacular eye-level views of Great Frigatebirds *Fregata minor* and White-tailed Tropicbirds hanging in the breeze.

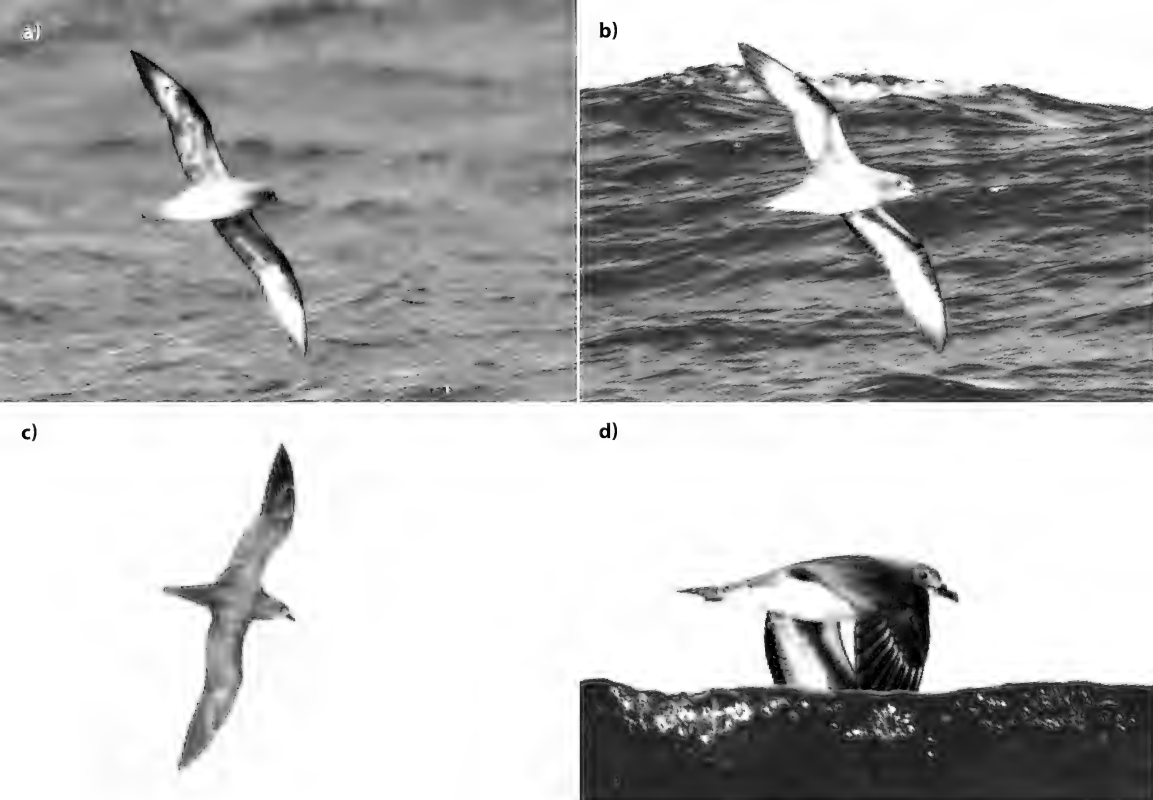


Plate 19 a–c. Tropical Shearwater, Great Frigatebird and White-tailed Tropicbird on Arde Island, Seychelles.

## Mauritius

Seabirding activities focused on Round Island and the *Pterodroma* that breed there together with some Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*, Brown Noddy and Sooty Terns breeding on the nearby Serpent Island.

The taxonomy of the species of *Pterodroma* breeding on Round Island was surveyed by Brown *et al.* (2011) who concluded that the “..parental populations of the Round Island birds (*P. arminjoniana* from Trindade and *P. neglecta* from the Pacific Islands)<sup>3</sup> do not share any haplotypes, and therefore we conclude that the overlapping haplotypes on Round Island are the result of hybridization between these two species rather than shared ancestral polymorphism”. In other words, the parental populations of Trindade and Kermadec Petrels in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans do not have the common genetic material found in all birds on Round Island. The situation is further complicated by the fact that Herald Petrel *P. heraldica* has been observed breeding with a dark morph bird, with dark primary shafts, presumed to be a Trindade Petrel *P. arminjoniana*. Consequently, sight identification of *Pterodroma* petrels from Round Island is fraught with difficulty as hybridization between at least two, and possibly three, species is occurring. The photographs in Plate 20 provide a small sample of birds showing traits of both *P. neglecta* and *P. arminjoniana*.



**Plate 20 a–d.** Some *Pterodroma* Petrels off Round Island, Mauritius showing some features of Kermadec Petrel *P. neglecta* (a and d) and pale morph Trindade Petrel *P. arminjoniana* (b, c and d).

## Reunion

In addition to looking for the island's endemic bird species we took an afternoon pelagic trip from St Gilles les-Bains and although we were never far from land, good and regular sightings of Barau's Petrel, Tropical Shearwater and Wedge-tailed Shearwater were enjoyed. Several Barau's Petrel and Tropical Shearwater were located sitting on the water and provided good close views as they took off near the boat, Plates 21 and 22. A Barau's Petrel with its feet showing the dipped-in-paint effect found on some seabirds is illustrated in Plate 21.

We spent several hours at sea until just after dark with no sign of the elusive Mascarene Petrel, although Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* was sighted. To find the

**Plate 21.** Barau's Petrel off St Gilles les-Bains, Reunion, November 2017. **Plate 22.** Tropical Shearwater off St Gilles les-Bains, Reunion, November 2017.





elusive Mascarene Petrel requires a lot more time and effort, possibly further out to sea off St-Pierre, as described by Shirihai (2014).

To see Barau's Petrel, however, there is no need to go to sea at all as thousands congregate along the coast south of St Gilles les-Bains and are perhaps most numerous in the bay off the Saint-Etienne River mouth near St Louis. I spent several hours there from late afternoon until after dusk and managed some close photographs as they flew overhead along the rocky shore. Plate 23 is one of the better examples taken on the rocky shore near the Saint-Etienne river mouth at St Louis.



**Plate 23.** Barau's Petrel over the rocky foreshore near the Saint-Etienne River mouth, St Louis, Reunion November 2017.

## Concluding Remarks

The Seychelles, Mauritius and Reunion offer some excellent sea birding opportunities both at sea, sea-watching from land and on ferry trips between islands in the Seychelles (although we saw very little between Mahe and Praslin). Pelagic trips require some planning and in the case of Mascarene Petrel a December visit with several excursions from Saint Pierre would seem to offer the best opportunity for finding this elusive species.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Neil Cheshire for helpful suggestions on an earlier draft.

<sup>2</sup> Those interested in a full trip report can consult Mills (2018).

<sup>3</sup> Eikenaar and Skerrett (2006) report the first record of Kermadec Petrel *P. neglecta*, from Cousin Island in the Seychelles in 2003.



**Plate 24.** Knowsley Hall. © S Chapman

## **Bon Voyage? 250 Years Exploring the Natural World: BOC Conference Report**

by Stephen Chapman

*Bon Voyage? 250 Years Exploring the Natural World* was the theme for a fascinating conference organised by the Society for the History of Natural History with the British Ornithologists' Club and held at the World Museum Liverpool in June 2018 - the year of the 250th anniversary of Captain James Cook's first voyage to the Pacific on *HMS Endeavour*. Cook's voyages influenced many areas of science and exploration - from astronomy and geology to natural history and anthropology. The meeting drew people from around the world to listen and discuss the history of natural history exploration around the world, on land and at sea; the risks they took, the discoveries made and their contributions to science.

Presented here is a summary of selected papers having a maritime and ornithological bias.

### **Knowsley Hall**

Ahead of the conference delegates visited Knowsley Hall, the home of the successive Earls of Derby. It was the 13th Earl Sir Edward Stanley (1775–1851) whose passion beyond horse-racing was his menagerie, aviary and natural history pursuits. These were interests that as a major landowner, one of the richest in Britain, he was able to indulge. He built up a large collection of birds, mammals and plants and became acquainted with John Latham, the foremost English ornithologist of his day. At the Zoological Society of London Lord Stanley met Edward Lear and hired him to record in art form rare species in his own collection. He also became an avid collector of specimens from the London and Liverpool dealers and collectors, with live and dead specimens returning from overseas travels. Visitors to Knowsley included John James Audubon, Charles Lucien Bonaparte and John Gould.



Plates 25–26. Knowsley Hall. © S Chapman

After lunch conference visitors were treated to a rare opportunity to examine close-up the paintings of Edward Lear who besides entertaining children with his nonsense rhymes was a very gifted artist. Guided by Stephen Lloyd, curator, we gathered in the library amongst cases of antiquarian portfolios and studied at leisure the finest works of L J Robins and Edward Lear.

## The Conference

The 25 speakers covered a wide range of explorations and discoveries. Jordan Goodman of University College, London, set the scene. What became clear was how much more organised things became after the first voyage of the three-masted barque *Endeavour*, which began in 1768. The earlier vessels were small and cramped, but in 1776 *Resolution*, a former collier, was specifically converted with collectors and collections in mind. The space normally allocated to the captain was now designed for the scientific work of the collectors and the captain was moved to a smaller cabin. How far Cook voyaged and the progress in navigation made in those 12 years, with the ability to calculate longitude with greater precision using Harrison's marine chronometer are amazing.

## Parkinson's Petrel

Sydney Parkinson was employed by Joseph Banks to travel with him on Cook's first voyage to the Pacific, drawing thousands of plants and animals in very difficult conditions. He died at sea on that voyage and is commemorated in the common and scientific name of the Parkinson's Petrel *Procellaria parkinsoni*. The illustration here is by Joseph Smit, 1896. The RNBWS global database shows sightings of this petrel across the sub-tropical South Pacific and several sightings off Ecuador<sup>1</sup>.

On Cook's third voyage on HMS *Resolution* they collected vast numbers of living plants to bring back to Kew to create the world's finest botanical collection.

Edwin Rose of the University of Cambridge explained how Banks and Daniel Solander used the Linnaean system of classification to record and classify. Solander had a system he had developed at the British Museum to manage the huge amount of information collected. He



Plate 27. Wikimedia Commons.

also described the transport of breadfruit plants from the Pacific, to feed the workers in the Caribbean sugar plantations as conflict prevented the supply of grain from America.

## The challenge of preserving specimens

Preserving and transporting specimens in those early years brought its own challenges. Stanislav Strekopyto of the Natural History Museum recounted the evolution of preserving zoological specimens in spirit. For dry specimens, protection against insects was a pressing issue. A corrosive sublimate (mercury(II) chloride) was used at that time, and this continued to be used by taxidermists in Britain well into the 20th century.

The topic of preservation was picked up again by Leslie Overstreet of the Smithsonian Libraries when she addressed *The (Most Important) Books on the Beagle*. When it set sail in December 1831 on its second surveying voyage for the Royal Navy HMS *Beagle* (a brig of 242 tons and less than 100 feet long) boasted a ship-board library of some 400 volumes on travel, exploration, natural history, navigation, and related subjects; most belonged to Captain Robert Fitzroy. Naturalist Charles Darwin brought some of his own as well.

Leslie showed that the two most important titles were small, obscure booklets that illuminated Darwin's work as a practising naturalist, collecting specimens and describing them in his letters and subsequent publications: the first was Paris Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle's *Instruction Pour Les Voyageurs...* (1818) and the other Patrick Syme's *Werner's Nomenclature of Colours* (1812). She said that the methods of preserving and transporting specimens (dead or alive) were of crucial and sometimes controversial interest for naturalists through the centuries. From the 1800s arsenical soap was used. Through much the same period, in their correspondence and publications naturalists had begun trying to define the colour terms used to identify and distinguish species, as well as the pigments used to illustrate them, initially by incorporating colour charts in their own books and eventually by setting standards intended for wide-spread adoption.

Continuing the theme of skin preservation, the presenter talked about the French ornithologist Jean-Baptiste Bécœur (1718–1777), who was the son of an apothecary. Bécœur studied pharmacy then devoted himself to natural history studying mainly insects and birds. At this time conservation techniques were primitive. Bécœur developed a method that preserved bird specimens and prevented them from being damaged by insect attack. He sent birds thus prepared to the Jardin du Roi, later to become the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, which earned him the praises of Georges-Louis Buffon and helped revolutionize the conservation of birds and ornithology at the museum.

His method of conservation was based on arsenic but he died without publishing the recipe of the arsenical soap. However, Bécœur's secret had been handed over to François Levaillant (1753–1828), who sold the recipe together with his collection of birds, animals and plants to the French government in 1797.

Advancing to the 19th century, Edward Dickinson described how the French naturalist for the Paris Museum, Alcide d'Orbigny, travelled extensively in South America between 1826 and 1833. He visited Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia and returned to France with a collection of more than 10,000 natural history specimens. Several zoological and botanical taxa were named in his honour, including the Rusty-vented Canastero *Asthenes d'orbignyi*, of the family *Furnariidae* found in the Andes in Peru, Chile, Bolivia, and north-western Argentina in

montane scrub; also the Grey-breasted Seedsnipe *Thinocorus orbignyianu*, *Thinocoridae* family. This is found in the temperate grasslands, subtropical or tropical high-altitude grassland, and swamps of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, and Peru.

## De Filippi's Petrel

Carlo Bovolo of Fondazione Filippo Burzio, Turin presented a paper that dealt with the Italian zoologist Filippo De Filippi (1814–1867) and his diplomatic and exploratory adventures for the Kingdom of Italy. Professor Filippi sailed on the corvette *Magenta* as scientific director on a three year around the world voyage. He died in Hong Kong of hepatitis and his assistant Enrico Giglioli was left to make observations about the fauna. De Filippi's Petrel or Masatierra Petrel *Pterodroma defilippiana*, a gadfly petrel in the family *Procellariidae*, endemic to Chile where it nests in the Juan Fernández Islands, was named in his memory. See Plate {XXXIII} from George Dawson Rowley's 'Ornithological Miscellany,' Vol. I (1876). The RNBWS global database shows sightings of this petrel in the Humboldt Current and beyond, from 14S to 40S.



Plate 28. Wikimedia Commons.

## The fate of Penguins and Seals

The final paper in this summary was presented by Rosi Crane, Honorary Curator of the Otago Museum in Dunedin, charting the voyages made by the government steamship *SS Hinemoa*. In 1895 and 1903 the ship carried out the first scientific dredging in New Zealand and the spare capacity on the ship fitted in well with its main role of offshore patrols, supplying lighthouses and searching for shipwrecked sailors. In 1907 a major scientific expedition took passage, setting up camp for the summer months on Auckland Island and Campbell Island. Further south on sub-Antarctic Macquarie Island Joseph Hatch (1837–1928) a local business man and politician was found to be exploiting the island wildlife. His business was harvesting penguins and Elephant Seals *Mirounga leonina* and processing their blubber for oil, and about two million penguins were killed over nearly three decades. Rosi's slides depicted the wholesale slaughter of seals for their oil, bringing the creature to the verge of extinction at the end of the 19th century.

At this point Hatch switched the sealers at Nuggets Point on Macquarie Island to catching and processing fat young penguins *Eudyptes*, and this had a devastating impact on their population. The gruesome story of the exploitation is recounted in the Sealer's Shanty, vol 9 and 11, via Wiki. The Tasmanian Government did not renew Hatch's lease on Macquarie Island when it expired in 1920. This was probably because the negative publicity his business was attracting reflected poorly on the Government. Such practices are outlawed today.



Plate 29. Remains of the penguin digesters, Luisitania Bay, Macquarie Island. © Christo Baars, Australian Antarctic Division

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<sup>1</sup> April 2014 Tony Tindale and Steve Copsey.



Plate 30 a-c. Probable Newell's Shearwater.

# The last bird of 2013 - notes from the South Pacific

by Simon Cook

(Photographs by the author)

During a voyage from New Zealand to Papua New Guinea over Christmas and New Year 2013/14 on a small passenger ship, a number of interesting sea and land-bird sightings were made. Our itinerary took us from Auckland up to the Bay of Islands and then on to Norfolk Island, the Isle of Pines (New Caledonia), calls in Vanuatu and several stops in the Solomon Islands. From there the ship sailed directly to Rabaul, New Britain (Papua New Guinea), where I departed.

Working on small so-called 'expedition' passenger ships (as opposed to naval or cargo vessels) has many benefits but there are also many calls on one's time when trying to fit in seabird watch periods. Unlike bridge personnel, who have fixed hours, I have to factor in, for example, the many off-ship excursions, meal times, meetings, mandatory drills, lectures, miscellaneous duties, note-writing - and even sleep. Having said that, I do spend as much time as possible on watch, looking for birds, cetaceans or anything else that may be of interest.

Quite often I will slip in a watch before breakfast, when none of my colleagues are up and when I can count on being uninterrupted. Days at sea offer the best opportunities because the day's activities (mostly lectures) are planned in advance so I can often put in several hours at a time. My minimum watch period is one hour and the maximum is normally four hours. I much prefer to put in a good amount of time, rather than gathering lots of short-duration 'snapshots', for the RNBWS seabird database. In addition to the record sheets I also submit details of any interesting 'off-watch' seabird records. Landbirds at sea are particularly exciting for me so I am always on the lookout for them too.

But back to New Zealand. Even before the cruise had started I had seen Red-billed Gulls *Larus scopulinus* aboard a local ferry and both Paradise Shelduck *Tadorna variegata* and Australasian Harrier *Circus approximatus* from it - three new species for my ships and boats lists. The Tasman Sea produced a good selection of seabirds, including terns, tropicbirds, boobies, shearwaters and petrels (such as Parkinson's *Procellaria parkinsoni*, Black-winged *Pterodroma nigripennis*, Grey-faced *P. macroptera*, White-necked *P. cervicalis*, Gould's *P. leucoptera*, Collared *P. brevipes* and Tahiti *P. tostrata*). The first bird

to be seen on the ship was a Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica* at Luganville, on Espiritu Santo in Vanuatu; others followed later in the voyage. On arrival back at the ship at Luganville after a tour I saw a small bird high up on the mast. Dashing aboard, I was surprised to see that it was a Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*, a species not apparently reported before from Vanuatu (Birds of Melanesia, Guy Dutson).

Perhaps the most intriguing seabird of the whole voyage was seen on the morning of 3 January 2014 in the Santa Cruz Islands, in the eastern part of the Solomon Islands. Having been pre-warned to look out for a potentially new species of shearwater with an underwing pattern like a Black-winged Petrel, I was nevertheless surprised to see several of these birds. The first of five was distant but one of the others was flushed by the ship from the sea in front of us so good views were obtained. Medium-sized, black-and-white and with a broad black band around the otherwise white underwing, the birds were very distinctive. The only species close in looks in my reference book (Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World, Onley & Schofield) was Newell's Shearwater *Puffinus Newelli*, with populations on Hawaii (2,880 nautical miles away) and Rapa in southern Polynesia (2,917 nm away). Birds available for comparison that morning included Wedge-tailed Shearwaters *P. pacificus* and Tahiti and White-necked Petrels. The first of the different shearwaters was flying in a southerly direction (we were sailing north) and the last two were seen just outside the fringing reef of forested Vanikoro Island. Later I did some research and consulted Neil Cheshire, and we concluded that the birds were 'out of range' Newell's Shearwater.

Also seen during the approach to Vanikoro Island were two Uniform Swiftlets *Collocalia vanikorensis*, which are described as nomadic by Dutson. The first one was seen at 09.05, 32 nautical miles south of the island and it was flying due north, was very close to the ship and was in sight for 10 minutes. The ship was cruising at 10 knots. The second bird was seen at 09.16 coming up astern of us and was in sight until 10.32 - just before the island was sighted. Seeing swifts at sea again (*Sea Swallow* 62, p107) was a big surprise. During the day I was also excited to see a single Cuvier's Beaked Whale *Ziphius cavirostris* and several Dwarf Sperm Whales *Kogia sima* - the first of the latter spotted by my non-birding wife!

The next bird of note was a Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, which flew around the ship a mile off Nendo Island, and from my zodiac here I saw a nice group of feeding Red-bellied Fruit Doves *Ptilinopus greyii*. Later at Santa Ana Island I saw only two species of birds but one was a life bird that I had looked for in vain in other places - Beach Thick-knee *Esacus magnirostris*. If they had been on land I would not have seen them but when they flew past me, flashing white in their wings, I knew immediately what they were.

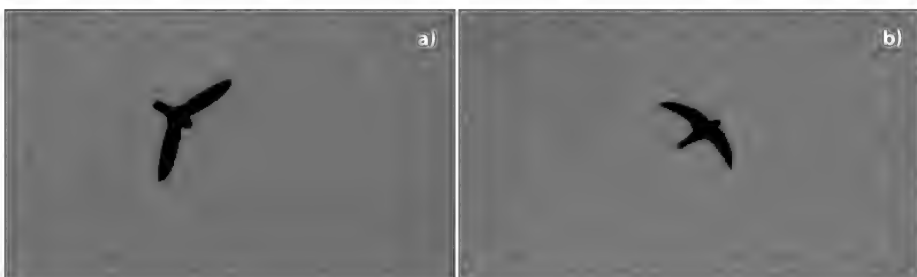


Plate 31 a-b. Uniform Swiftlet.



**Plate 32.** Kevin Morgan with the Wedge-tailed Shearwater.

At Vangunu Island, New Georgia I saw a number of interesting birds, either from the ship or the zodiac: Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel*, Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*, Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*, Eastern Reef Egret *Egretta sacra*, White-bellied Cuckoo-Shrike *Coracina papuensis* and Metallic Starling *Aplonis metallica*. There were also some that I had not seen from ships or boats before: Olive-backed Sunbird *Cunmyris jugularis*, Island Imperial Pigeon *Ducula pistrinaria*, Blyth's Hornbill *Rhyticeros plicatus*, Moustached Treeswift *Hemiprocne mystacea* and Solomons Cockatoo *Cacatua ducorpsii*. Our last full day on the ship was spent in the Solomon Sea and, being only 7 degrees south of the equator, seabirds were few and far between. However, the first bird of the day was another at-sea surprise - a Great Egret *Ardea alba*. We were 28 nm southeast of Bouganville but the egret was flying strongly in a south-south westerly direction - to where, I wondered.

The cruise ended the next morning in Rabaul and sailing past the nearby heavily-smoking volcano at sunrise was very impressive. Pacific Swallow and Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys* landed on the ship but the best bird seen from the deck before a hurried departure was a Bismarck Crow *Corvus insularis*. Two of them were later seen flying over the town. But finally, I should return to the 'last bird of 2013', referred to in the title. As the ship sailed towards Vanuatu a New Year's Eve party was in full swing in the lounge, with much music, dancing and general high spirits. Taking a much-needed break at 22.50 I headed for some fresh air. Looking through the door out onto the deck I was amazed to see a Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Pterodroma nigripennis* sitting there - despite checking the decks before dawn every day this was the only seabird that I found on the ship during the entire voyage, and not only was it my last bird of 2013 but it was also, by a strange quirk of fate, my 250th species of bird seen on board ships and boats.

**Simon Cook**

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**Plate 33.** Birders onboard the MV *Plancius*.

## The Atlantic Odyssey - from Argentina to Cape Verde

by Keith Betton

*(Photographs by the author)*

Every year some of the cruise ships that operate in the Antarctic from November to March have to make the long journey back to the Northern Hemisphere to prepare for their Arctic season from May to September. To offset the cost of that long journey a few of them take on paying passengers and instead of taking a direct route back, call in at several places along the way. The route was marketed as The Atlantic Odyssey, and Oceanwide Expeditions have operated this repositioning cruise for 20 years. It departs from Ushuaia in Argentina and calls in at South Georgia, Gough Island, Tristan da Cunha, Saint Helena, Ascension Island and the Cape Verde Islands.

However, there are disadvantages in taking that rather slow zigzag route, and in particular it means that the company has very little time to prepare the ship for its Arctic voyages once it docks at its home port of Rotterdam. As a result, the tour is now only offered occasionally (the next being in 2020). As a result this was a full ship with 115 customers, at least sixty of whom were birders. I was one of them, and I am going to share the highlights here. I have added up all of the main seabirds seen, and shown the number of days each was observed, with first and last dates, and all of this data can now be seen on the accompanying Table 1, as well as on the RNBWS database.



We departed from Ushuaia on 28 March and headed down the Beagle Channel. Our ship was the *MV Plancius*, built in 1976 as an oceanographic research vessel for the Royal Netherlands Navy, and decommissioned in 2004. At 89 metres and with a displacement of 3211 tonnes the vessel was completely rebuilt to carry 116 passengers, and is a brilliant ship from which to watch wildlife.

With a couple of exceptions I have started the birding list from the point where we left the Beagle Channel. By the time we awoke the next morning, we were heading south across the Drake Passage and by the end of our first day at sea we had recorded an excellent total of 23 seabird species.

We arrived off South Georgia on 2 April and for the next three days enjoyed the exciting experiences provided by the massive penguin colonies of Salisbury Plain and St Andrew's Bay. Both locations hold close to 100,000 King Penguins, and by April the adults are outnumbered by brown chicks that are already moulting. A visit to Prion Island gave us close views of Wandering Albatross on the nest, and it was pleasing to see many South Georgia Pipits; the successful eradication of rats from South Georgia has saved this species from almost certain extinction. A visit to Grytviken allowed us to see the horrors of the early 1900s whaling operations, and a chance to spend a quiet moment at Sir Ernest Shackleton's grave. A final day over in the south-east corner of the island revealed the impressive Drygalski Fjord with its Macaroni Penguins and great flocks of Cape Petrels and Wilson's Storm-petrels.

A further five days at sea gave us plenty of opportunities to watch seabirds, but for me the main focus was going to be Gough Island - some 1,350 miles away.



**Plate 34 (opposite).** a) King Penguins. b) Salisbury Plain, South Georgia. c) King Penguins. d) Macaroni Penguin. e) South Georgia Pipit. f) Yellow-billed Pintail. **Plate 35 (above).** King Penguins, St Andrews Bay, South Georgia.

As we got nearer to the island the numbers of seabirds increased dramatically, particularly as we moved from the cold Antarctic waters south of the Antarctic Convergence into the warmer subantarctic waters of the South Atlantic. Along the way three Western Cattle Egrets joined us, no doubt having departed from South America a few days earlier. At least one of the birds was killed by a Subantarctic Skua, while another was flushed and then struggled to keep up with the ship. At least one bird managed to keep with us until we reached Tristan da Cunha.

On the morning of 10 April, we awoke to find ourselves anchored in the lee of Gough Island, which towered above us. The water was choppy but we headed off in the Zodiacs to cruise along the sheltered east coast of the island. Landing is not permitted, but we were able to see colonies of Northern Rockhopper Penguins and small numbers of Gough Finches flying between the rocks.

We next set off for Tristan da Cunha, some 220 miles to the northwest. There had been gale-force winds blowing for the previous three days and as a result the passengers of another cruise ship had failed to get ashore. However, luck was on our side and on 12 April we spent a bright and sunny day on the island with Gough Moorhens scuttling up hillsides and a very obliging Tristan Thrush which allowed us to get as close as three metres.

Sadly the fine weather did not last and any chances of landing on Nightingale or Inaccessible Island were ruled out by the expedition leader. Instead, we sailed around the coast at a safe distance.



**Plate 36 (above).** Wandering Albatross. **Plate 37 (opposite).** a) Sooty Albatross. b) Black-browed Albatross. c) Wandering Albatross. d) Yellow-nosed Albatross. e) Tristan Albatross.





It took us another four full days to cover the 1,330 miles to our next stop, St Helena. On the afternoon of the third day we crossed the Tropic of Capricorn and by sunset on the fourth we were 140 miles from the island. The seawatching was a bit disappointing on this section, but for me this was made up for by three full days on St Helena. For the birders there was a degree of anxiety about whether we would obtain good views of the endemic St Helena Plover (or Wirebird), but in the end we were taken by the warden to within four metres of a nesting bird! For the non-birders there was a historical tour of Jamestown, and a visit to the farm where Napoleon was held under house arrest in his last years.

We were now under the influence of the southeast Trades, and for the next 700 miles to Ascension there was a fresh breeze and a fair swell. Seabird numbers started to build again, but nothing had prepared me for the huge colonies on Boatswain Bird Island, a small islet surrounded by steep cliffs near the eastern tip of Ascension. Almost the entire population of Ascension Frigatebirds nests on this one small island, and we were soon enjoying close-up views of at least a thousand of these great birds, at rest on the cliffs or cruising about overhead. A visit to the Sooty Tern colony at Wideawake Fairs was also memorable as was the chance to watch Atlantic Green Sea Turtles laying their eggs the next evening.

It was over 1,400 miles from Ascension to the Cape Verdes and this took us another five full days at sea. It was now getting quite hot, and as we passed through the doldrums on the Equator, the temperature rose to over 30°C. However, we soon came under the influence of the northeast Trades and from then on there was a stiff breeze to cool us down. Once again the seawatching was less impressive than expected, and



**Plate 38 (opposite).** a) Great Shearwater. b) Soft-plumaged Petrel. c) Kerguelan Petrel. d) Atlantic Petrel. e) Broad-billed Prion. f) Grey Petrel. **Plate 39 (above).** Spectacled Petrel.

although we were now seeing Cory's Shearwater, Bulwer's Petrel, Leach's Storm-Petrel and Long-tailed Skua, the numbers seemed quite low. We only saw two Cape Verde Shearwaters and two Scopoli's Shearwaters - although many shearwaters were too far from the ship to allow identification. None of us saw a Boyd's Shearwater, and a group of three White-faced Storm-Petrels were almost too distant to identify.

However, as we berthed at Praia on the Cape Verde island of Santiago, we all knew we had been on an amazing journey that few civilians had ever undertaken before, and many fewer would experience again.

In addition to the seabirds here are the endemic birds of the islands that we saw.

**Yellow-billed Pintail** *Anas georgica georgica*: We enjoyed good views at several locations around South Georgia including Cooper Bay and Grytviken. Some authorities split this as South Georgia Pintail.

**Gough Moorhen** *Gallinula comeri*: Efforts to obtain a distant view of one on a hillside on Tristan da Cunha seemed rather daft when we saw at least eight at much closer range during the island visit. Formerly a Gough Island endemic, a few birds were released on Tristan in 1956.

**St Helena Plover (Wirebird)** *Charadrius sanctaehelenae*: We had exceptional views of at least ten including a bird on the nest. This small plover, a close relative of the common and widespread Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius* of Africa, is recovering from a low population level thanks to eradication of feral cats and rats in their breeding areas.



Plate 40 (above). Brown Skua, *lonnbergi* race. Plate 41 (opposite). a) Sooty Terns. b) Brown Booby. c) Brown Skua, *hamiltoni* race. d) Masked Booby. e) Ascension Frigatebird. f) Red-footed Booby.





Table 1. Seabirds recorded during the Atlantic Odyssey 2018.

Species	Scientific name	Total seen	Days seen	First date	Last date
<b>Family: Spheniscidae</b>					
King Penguin	<i>Aptenodytes patagonicus</i>	c. 200000	6	31-Mar	05-Apr
Gentoo Penguin	<i>Pygoscelis papua</i>	367	4	01-Apr	04-Apr
Chinstrap Penguin	<i>Pygoscelis antarcticus</i>	304	1	04-Apr	04-Apr
Macaroni Penguin	<i>Eudyptes chrysolophus</i>	c. 5000	4	01-Apr	05-Apr
Magellanic Penguin	<i>Spheniscus magellanicus</i>	26	2	28-Mar	29-Mar
Northern Rockhopper Penguin	<i>Eudyptes moseleyi</i>	c. 1700	4	09-Apr	13-Apr
<b>Family: Oceanitidae</b>					
Wilson's Storm-petrel	<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>	485	10	29-Mar	11-Apr
Grey-backed Storm-petrel	<i>Garrodia nerels</i>	10	2	29-Mar	09-Apr
White-faced Storm-petrel	<i>Pelagodroma marina</i>	3	1	30-Apr	30-Apr
White-bellied Storm-petrel	<i>Fregetta grallaria</i>	27	8	06-Apr	22-Apr
Black-bellied Storm-petrel	<i>Fregetta tropica</i>	204	12	29-Mar	14-Apr
<b>Family: Diomedidae</b>					
Wandering Albatross	<i>Diomedea exulans</i>	46	10	29-Mar	09-Apr
Tristan Albatross	<i>Diomedea dabbenena</i>	27	6	07-Apr	13-Apr
Southern Royal Albatross	<i>Diomedea epomophora</i>	3	1	29-Mar	29-Mar
Sooty Albatross	<i>Phoebastria fusca</i>	58	9	05-Apr	14-Apr
Light-mantled Albatross	<i>Phoebastria palpebrata</i>	11	7	01-Apr	08-Apr
Black-browed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche melanophris</i>	68	15	28-Mar	11-Apr
Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche chlororhynchus</i>	200	4	10-Apr	13-Apr
Shy Albatross	<i>Thalassarche cauta</i>	1	1	08-Apr	08-Apr
Grey-headed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche chrysostoma</i>	14	6	29-Mar	08-Apr
<b>Family: Hydrobatidae</b>					
Band-rumped Storm-petrel	<i>Oceanodroma castro</i>	58	8	17-Apr	25-Apr
Leach's Storm-petrel	<i>Oceanodroma leucorhoa</i>	144	7	21-Apr	29-Apr
<b>Family: Procellariidae</b>					
Southern Giant Petrel	<i>Macronectes giganteus</i>	75	7	28-Mar	10-Apr
Northern Giant Petrel	<i>Macronectes halli</i>	145	12	29-Mar	11-Apr
Southern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	5	1	28-Mar	28-Mar
Cape Petrel	<i>Daption capense</i>	c. 2200	5	29-Mar	04-Apr
Blue Petrel	<i>Halobaena caerulea</i>	11	3	31-Mar	04-Apr
Broad-billed Prion	<i>Pachyptila vittata</i>	c. 5000	4	07-Apr	11-Apr
Salvin's Prion	<i>Pachyptila salvini</i>	125	5	07-Apr	11-Apr
Antarctic Prion	<i>Pachyptila desolata</i>	30	6	30-Mar	08-Apr
Slender-billed Prion	<i>Pachyptila belcheri</i>	c. 100	3	29-Mar	04-Apr
Fairy Prion	<i>Pachyptila turrit</i>	17	4	31-Mar	07-Apr
Kerguelen Petrel	<i>Aphrodroma brevirostris</i>	27	7	30-Mar	09-Apr
Great-winged Petrel	<i>Pterodroma macroptera</i>	c. 5100	11	05-Apr	15-Apr
White-headed Petrel	<i>Pterodroma lessoni</i>	1	1	14-Apr	14-Apr
Atlantic Petrel	<i>Pterodroma incerta</i>	72	9	30-Mar	13-Apr
Soft-plumaged Petrel	<i>Pterodroma mollis</i>	c. 750	15	29-Mar	14-Apr

Grey Petrel	Procellaria cinerea	36	8	30-Mar	10-Apr
White-chinned Petrel	Procellaria aequinoctialis	103	12	29-Mar	08-Apr
Spectacled Petrel	Procellaria conspicillata	90	10	06-Apr	15-Apr
Scopoli's Shearwater	Calonectris diomedea	2	1	29-Apr	29-Apr
Cory's Shearwater	Calonectris borealis	14	7	21-Apr	29-Apr
Cape Verde Shearwater	Calonectris edwardsii	2	1	30-Apr	30-Apr
Sooty Shearwater	Ardenna grisea	33	10	28-Mar	15-Apr
Great Shearwater	Ardenna gravis	c. 540	11	29-Mar	13-Apr
Subantarctic Shearwater	Puffinus elegans	55	9	31-Mar	13-Apr
Magellanic Diving Petrel	Pelecanoides magellani	1	1	29-Mar	29-Mar
South Georgia Diving Petrel	Pelecanoides georgicus	c. 100	4	31-Mar	05-Apr
Common Diving Petrel	Pelecanoides urinatrix	c. 1400	8	29-Mar	09-Apr
Bulwer's Petrel	Bulweria bulwerii	28	10	16-Apr	29-Apr
<b>Family: Phaethontidae</b>					
Red-billed Tropicbird	Phaethon aethereus	21	8	16-Apr	29-Apr
White-tailed Tropicbird	Phaethon lepturus	19	4	22-Apr	26-Apr
<b>Family: Fregatidae</b>					
Ascension Frigatebird	Fregata aquila	c. 2000	4	22-Apr	25-Apr
<b>Family: Suidae</b>					
Masked Booby	Sula dactylatra	150	4	18-Apr	24-Apr
Red-footed Booby	Sula sula	8	4	23-Apr	28-Apr
Brown Booby	Sula leucogaster	6	3	18-Apr	24-Apr
<b>Family: Phalacrocoracidae</b>					
South Georgia Shag	Leucocarbo georgianus	c. 1000	4	01-Apr	04-Apr
<b>Family: Chionidae</b>					
Snowy Shearbill	Atlantisia rogersi	56	3	02-Apr	04-Apr
<b>Family: Laridae</b>					
Brown Noddy	Anous stolidus	263	6	18-Apr	25-Apr
Black Noddy	Anous minutus	432	6	18-Apr	25-Apr
White Tern	Gygis alba	71	7	18-Apr	25-Apr
Brown-hooded Gull	Chroicocephalus maculipennis	20	1	28-Mar	28-Mar
Dolphin Gull	Leucophaeus scoresbii	10	1	28-Mar	28-Mar
Franklin's Gull	Leucophaeus pipixcan	1	1	19-Apr	19-Apr
Kelp Gull	Larus dominicanus	85	4	28-Mar	04-Apr
Sooty Tern	Onychoprion fuscatus	c. 11000	8	18-Apr	26-Apr
Arctic Tern	Sterna paradisaea	77	13	03-Apr	30-Apr
Antarctic Tern	Sterna vittata	354	11	02-Apr	13-Apr
<b>Family: Stercorariidae</b>					
Chilean Skua	Stercorarius chilensis	10	1	28-Mar	28-Mar
South Polar Skua	Stercorarius maccormicki	2	2	21-Apr	25-Apr
Brown Skua "Brown"	Stercorarius antarcticus antarcticus	7	3	06-Apr	09-Apr
Brown Skua "Subantarctic"	Stercorarius antarcticus maccormicki	48	5	31-Mar	04-Apr
Brown Skua "Tristan"	Stercorarius antarcticus lonnbergi	39	4	09-Apr	13-Apr
Pomarine Jaeger	Stercorarius pomarinus	9	3	25-Apr	28-Apr
Long-tailed Jaeger	Stercorarius longicaudus	21	9	06-Apr	29-Apr





**Plate 42 (opposite).** a) St Helena Plover breeding habitat. b) St Helena Plover. c) Tristan da Cunha.  
**Plate 43 (above).** Ascension Island.

**Tristan Thrush** *Nesocichla eremita*: Fearing (correctly) that we might not be able to land on Inaccessible or Nightingale, our first task on landing on Tristan da Cunha was to look for this species. A very obliging bird was found in a patch of *Phylica arborea* woodland.

**South Georgia Pipit** *Anthus antarcticus*: Easily found at a number of sites. The birds were extremely tame and we had some very close sightings from the Zodiacs. This endemic passerine was once widespread in South Georgia, and is building up its numbers again following the eradication of rats.

**Gough Finch** *Rowettia goughensis*: About six were seen from the Zodiacs as we cruised along the shore of Gough Island.

Endemic landbirds that we could have seen had landings been possible.

On Nightingale Island: **Nightingale Island Finch** *Nesospiza questi*  
**Wilkins's Finch** *Nesospiza wilkinsi*

On Inaccessible Island: **Inaccessible Island Rail** *Atlantisia rogersi*  
**Inaccessible Island Finch** *Nesospiza acunhae*

I would like to thank Hans Verdaat of Wageningen University for allowing me to share his data for the seabirds seen.

**Keith Betton**  
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Plate 44. A Zino's Petrel netted by Frank a couple of days after we left. © F Zino

## Madeira 2018 - RNBS support for Zino's Petrel conservation

by Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster

This was the third visit to Madeira by an RNBS team in support of the programme to protect Zino's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira* during the midsummer new-moon, in this case 7–14 June. The story of this endangered species has been well covered in recent issues of *Sea Swallow* and in the literature<sup>1</sup>, but in summary the species has a global population of only about 60–80 pairs as years of encroachment by man and introduced predators, particularly rats and cats, mean that the birds have been driven into a smaller and more remote area. The species now nests solely in one small area of steep cliffs at 1800m altitude near Pico do Arieiro, the highest point on the island of Madeira.

The species was first properly identified in 1969 by Paul Zino, a Madeiran businessman and conservationist and in 1986 the Freira Conservation project (named after 'Nun's Valley' near the breeding site) was founded with the aims of understanding and protecting the species. Since then this programme has operated every year to reduce predation, and in the breeding season to ring, measure and take biometric data from adult birds and chicks. Since Paul Zino's death some years ago this work is now run almost single-handedly by Paul's son Frank, and for the past few years the RNBS has been supporting his work with modest resources and a few volunteers for the netting season.

This year, Duncan and Dorothy Robertson, my wife and I formed the team which travelled to Madeira to help. We were fascinated to meet Frank Zino and his wife who were most hospitable to us and quite admirable in their hard work for conservation. Of our six nights on the island, we cancelled one netting trip due to obvious foul weather and a second having made the 1,800m ascent by car to the summit by sunset, to discover a howling gale. So this gave us just four nights to assist Frank with carrying the equipment the mile or so along the mountain path to the netting site, rigging the nets and of course, handling the birds. The path and the netting site are illustrated in Fig 1.

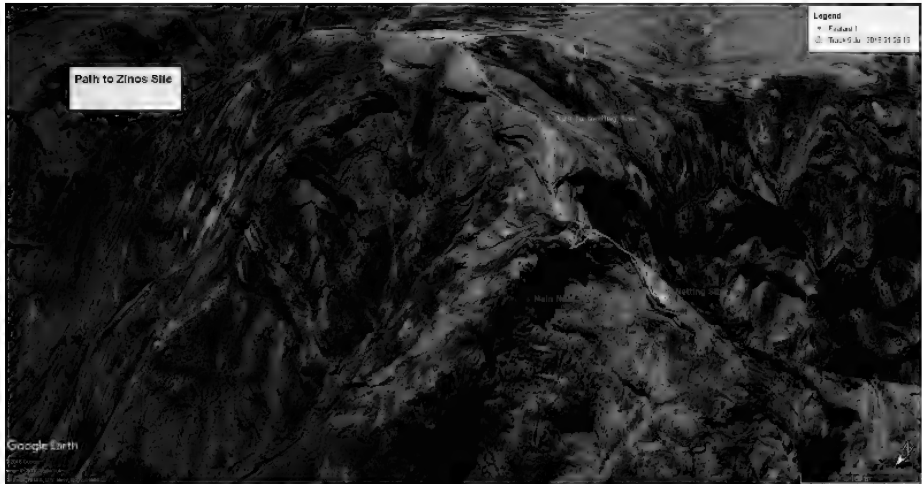


Figure 1. Google Earth view of Netting Site.

Unfortunately, even on these nights, the wind was strong and it was hard even to hear the calls, let alone see or net a bird. In the end, we failed to catch any and only saw two or three as glimpsed shadows. More worryingly, Frank was recording the frequency of the calls and they were well down on recent levels. His records are reproduced in Table 1 and may be compared with those published in *Sea Swallow 65* (two years ago). On the three nights where sensible data was recorded, an average of

Table 1. Record of Freira call data during RNBWS visit June 2018.

Date	6 June	8 June	9 June	10 June	11 June	12 June	13 June
Moon	None		None	None	None		None
Wind	V gusty	Aborted	NE	Strong NE	V strong	Zinos attend	Gale
Cloud	None	(weather)	None	None	Full	dinner	None
Net up	2220		2210	2215			2245
First call	2250		2240	2245	2345		2245
2230–2245	Only Manx		2	0	Few		0
2245–2300	12 calls, 1 seen		34	55	Calls. Left		3
2300–2315	20 calls, 2 seen		36	27	Early (wind)		2
2315–2330	69; many Manx			53	39		0
2330–2345	65; many Manx			94	51		2
2345–0000	58; many Manx			35	27		9
0000–0015	111		33	Down nets			17
0015–0030	Down nets		39				5
0030–0045	Return		39				Return
Ave/15 min	56		45	40			5



**Plate 45.** Cory's Shearwater rescued by fishermen. **Plate 46.** Plain Swift found on the mountain path. © M Alabaster

47 calls was heard per 15 minute period. This compares with 117 in 2016. Frank plans more work to investigate the possibility that some birds have moved their nest location to more distant ledges.

So it was a fascinating, if frustrating, visit to Pico do Arieiro and I plan to return to Madeira in order to help some more and to get a proper view of Zino's Petrel 'in the hand'. However, there were a couple of unexpected spin-off birds. First, whilst walking to the netting site at dusk, Duncan spotted what looked like a Swift sitting on the path. Investigation revealed that it was two Plain Swifts, *Apus unicolor*, tangled together, which had presumably fallen to the ground - perhaps having struck the cliff - while mating. They were identified and carefully separated and released, apparently unharmed. The second was our best seabird moment and arrived unexpectedly in Frank's driveway when fishermen delivered a cardboard box containing a rescued Cory's Shearwater, *Calonectris borealis*. The bird was apparently unharmed and was subsequently passed to a local conservationist, for release at sea, in an unlikely handover at the top of the mountain that evening.

Elsewhere on the island we had a pleasant time exploring and birding, picking up one of the two endemics, although not the Madeira Firecrest *Regulus madeirensis* which everyone says is "really easy to see"! We didn't fit in a pelagic tour, but I think that will be on the list for our next visit.

In summary, this third RNBWS support visit was a weather-limited attempt to support a very worthwhile programme. Zino's Petrel is already endangered and evidence suggests that this status may be worsening. I hope RNBWS can continue to provide people and resources for this effort, for Frank Zino is a remarkable man but cannot succeed without some help. Any member who would like to join this effort in future years should contact the Expeditions Co-ordinator, Mark Cutts (*Email: expeditions@rnbws.org.uk*).

**Martin Alabaster**  
*Email: chairman@rnbws.org.uk*

<sup>1</sup>Zino, Francis; Oliveira, Paulo; King, Susan; Buckle Alan; Biscoito, Manuel; Neves, H Costa; Vasconcelos, Amílcar (2001). "Conservation of Zino's petrel *Pterodroma madeira* in the archipelago of Madeira". *Oryx*. 35 (2): 128–136. doi:10.1046/j.1365-3008.2001.00165.





**Plate 47.** The MV Letty moored off Galapagos.

## Galapagos 2017

by Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster

(Photographs by the author)

For more than ten years a group of us had talked idly about making the trip of a lifetime to visit the Galapagos. It came as something of a shock when in January 2016 it became clear that October 2017 was 'our window' for the expedition and I would be the one to arrange it. Our party grew from six to ten - four RNBWS members plus friends - and the trip expanded to include time in mainland Ecuador, justified by the argument that "once you've paid for the flights...". So at the end we had a plan for almost four weeks, with time on the high páramo at 3500m, in the Andean cloud forest and the Amazon rain forest before two weeks of cruising in the Galapagos Archipelago. The mainland part of the trip was extraordinary and included 278 bird species, 265 of which were new to me, such as Andean Condor, Cock O' the Rock and resplendent Ant Pittas as well as other fauna from Anacondas to Porcupines. All of this will be covered in a separate article for *Sea Swallow*.

So it was a Sunday morning when we boarded our 737 at Quito for the flight to the Galapagos via a short stop in the coastal city of Guayaquil. Then came the first of many surprises as several of my preconceptions of the islands were demolished. Like many, I suspect, I had an idea of Galapagos, based entirely on TV documentaries, as a series of small deserted islands visited only by David Attenborough and occasional passing yachtsmen. The truth is rather different.

Firstly, it is easy to get there by daily scheduled flights to one or other of the two airports. Secondly, the archipelago is much larger than you may imagine, with 18 major islands and a land area of 7,900 Km<sup>2</sup>. In terms relevant to *Sea Swallow* readers, this makes the Galapagos two thirds the size of the Falkland Islands<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, they are properly inhabited with a population of about 27,000 who are mostly farmers, fishermen and those engaged in supporting tourism. However, this population is limited to two islands and a small area of a third. In addition to

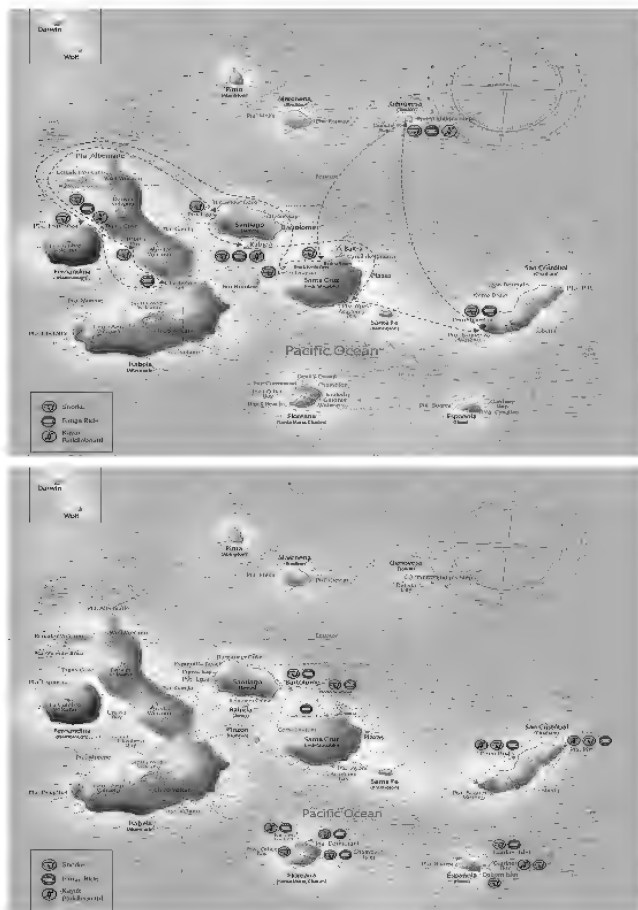


Figure 1. Galapagos itinerary aboard the MV Letty; week 1 (top), week 2 (bottom).

the great majority of the islands are out-of-bounds to visitors. Our experience was that at most sites there were no other visitors when we were there, so we felt as if we had the islands to ourselves. Furthermore, despite the number - almost 100 - of small cruise boats that tour the archipelago, we rarely saw other boats.

As readers will know, the islands lie right on the Equator, in the Pacific Ocean, about 600nm west of mainland South America and due South of Guatemala and New Orleans. They are special, of course, for two main reasons. Firstly, they are (relatively) new, volcanic islands on a (relatively) fast-moving tectonic plate which means that each island is a different age, at a different level of maturity and with a different climate and ecosystem. Secondly, they lie at the meeting point of three main ocean currents, including the Humboldt, and are therefore notably rich in marine life and nutrients. The isolation from the mainland means that while seabirds are largely common across the archipelago, land birds and those birds which are flightless tend to be restricted to certain, sometimes single islands. This isolation also means that species have followed different evolutionary paths, with unique results. In particular, there are almost no indigenous land mammals<sup>2</sup> and so the reptiles rule.

my rather naïve view of this tropical paradise, I also had a parallel worry that we would find a crass natural history theme park overrun by visitors from huge cruise ships. I am pleased to say that this image was wrong; I was very impressed by what I found.

It is true that the islands are well visited with about 100,000 visitors per year, which means between two and three hundred on any one day, but the visits are very tightly controlled. There are only 116 visitor sites in the Galapagos: 54 land sites and 62 scuba-diving or snorkelling sites. Small groups are allowed to visit in two to four-hour shifts only, and all groups are accompanied by licensed guides with at least one guide to 16 visitors. We visited about half the land sites and in each case were kept strictly to a marked path for about a mile of walking. This means that

Today, a little over half the visitors arrive by air, stay on the two main inhabited islands of San Cristobel and Santa Cruz and visit the wildlife sites on day excursions. This is satisfactory but does limit the places that they can visit to the central island group. The other, more traditional option is the cruise, staying in a small motor cruise ship and moving around the archipelago. This allows for overnight passages to the more distant sites and beautiful, early-morning arrivals at different places each day. Our ship, The MV *Letty*, was fairly typical of one of the older vessels. She carried 20 passengers, two guides and two RIBs (locally known as pangas) for beach landings and snorkelling. Accommodation was comfortable and the food excellent. Most visitors spend one week cruising the islands. We chose to spend two because the one week itineraries do not allow one to see Waved Albatross on Española as well as Flightless Cormorant and Galapagos Penguin on Isabella. The two one-week itineraries that made up our cruise are shown at Fig 1.



**Plates 48–49.** Waved Albatross, Española, Galapagos.

A note on place names. Rather confusingly, everywhere in the archipelago has two names. One is the older English name and the other the current Spanish one. Pleasingly, for an RNBWS member, these former names are all of Royal Navy origin, such as Charles, Chatham, Hood and Indefatigable, but out of respect for our Ecuadorian hosts we used the more recent names. This does not settle all the confusion, however, as species names continue to use either, apparently without pattern.

A typical day's routine would be breakfast at about 0730 as the ship was anchoring, followed by a two-hour trip ashore with a beach landing by panga and then a mile or so walk. We would return on board for a snack and then either go out snorkelling or rest while the ship re-positioned. This often happened over lunch and there would then be further trips ashore, snorkelling or coastal visits by boat or kayak. Each day usually had three or four two-hour activities.

We were given the Park's rules before getting ashore at Prince Philip's Steps on Genovesa: no food; no drink except water; no litter; no deviation from the path; no animal to be approached closer than two metres. This island is one of the oldest, with just the rim of the volcanic crater visible above the sea's surface. It made for a most spectacular anchorage and we could already see boobies and tropicbirds in the air. We all hoped that the strict application of the rules would not stop us seeing the wildlife, but we need not have worried. All the rules were followed strictly except the last, for within moments of stepping ashore we found a Nazca Booby<sup>3</sup> sitting on the nest, right in the middle of the path, necessitating a small detour just to get around it; and over the next few days we got used to stepping over iguanas, walking around giant tortoises and trying to remember not to sit on the sea lions.



**Plate 50.** Marine Iguanas, Galapagos.



**Plate 51.** Nigel Hacking on the trail of the elusive Hood Mockingbird.

I am sure that like many members, I have experienced how different a real wildlife trip is to that suggested by TV documentaries. On television one encounters creature after creature all in close up, with barely a pause for breath between animals, whereas in reality one walks for hours in the hope of catching a glimpse of a small brown bird, backlit, in a bush and a long way away. In the Galapagos, however, it is just like the TV documentary, or perhaps even better. The wildlife is everywhere and with one or two exceptions among the smaller birds, seems quite unafraid of man. It was extraordinary to get so close to so many remarkable species. Of the seabirds, the nesting Boobies (Nazca, Red-footed and Blue-footed) and courting Waved Albatross along with Galapagos Penguin (on the Equator!) and Flightless Cormorant were highlights, whilst the birders in our group were excited - of course - by the finches and mockingbirds. We also encountered a number of waders including Baird's Sandpiper, which had been something of a bogey-bird for Nigel Hacking. At sea it was the frigatebirds (both Great and Magnificent) that stole the show alongside rare gulls (Swallow-tailed and Lava), noddies, tropicbirds, shearwaters and the ever-present storm-petrels.



**Plate 52.** Galapagos Penguin.

Even the hardened bird types could not but be amazed at the other wildlife. Ashore, the Marine Iguanas could be seen in enormous numbers whilst the Land Iguanas were less common but even more impressive. We encountered several species/sub-species of Giant Tortoise and took enormous pleasure from swimming closely with Galapagos Sea Lions, Pacific Green Turtles and Marine Iguanas. We had several sightings of Bryde's Whales and occasional periods sailing alongside Bottle-nosed Dolphins<sup>4</sup>.

**Plate 53 a-g (overleaf).** **a)** Red-footed Booby. **b)** Magnificent Frigatebird raiding a Nazca Booby. **c)** Magnificent Frigatebirds. **d)** Magnificent Frigatebird on nest. **e)** Elliot's Storm-petrel. **f)** Lava Gull. **g)** Blue-footed Booby.



**Table 1.** Bird species recorded, Galapagos October 2017 (Total: 61 Species, 23 Endemic).

English name (Endemic - E)	Scientific name	English name (Endemic - E)	Scientific name
Lava Heron (E)	<i>Butorides sundevalli</i>	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
White-cheeked Pintail	<i>Anas bahamensis</i>	Semipalmated Sandpiper	<i>Calidris pusilla</i>
Galapagos Penguin (E)	<i>Spheniscus mendiculus</i>	Least Sandpiper	<i>Calidris minutilla</i>
Waved Albatross (E)	<i>Phoebastria irrorata</i>	White-rumped sandpiper	<i>Calidris fuscicollis</i>
Galapagos Petrel	<i>Pterodroma phaeopygia</i>	Baird's sandpiper	<i>Calidris bairdii</i>
Galapagos Shearwater (E)	<i>Puffinus subalaris</i>	Wilson's Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus tricolor</i>
Elliot's Storm-petrel	<i>Oceanites gracilis</i>	Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>
Wedge-rumped S-petrel	<i>Oceanodroma tethys</i>	Brown Noddy	<i>Anous stolidus</i>
Band-rumped S-petrel	<i>Oceanodroma castro</i>	Swallow-tailed Gull (E)	<i>Creagrurus furcatus</i>
American Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	Lava Gull (E)	<i>Leucophaeus fuliginosus</i>
Red-billed Tropicbird	<i>Pheathos aethereus</i>	Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>
Yellow-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>	Galapagos Dove (E)	<i>Zenaida galapagoensis</i>
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>
Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	Galapagos Flycatcher (E)	<i>Myarchus magnirostris</i>
Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Magnificent Frigatebird	<i>Fregata magnificens</i>	Galapagos Mockingbird (E)	<i>Mimus parvulus</i>
Great Frigatebird	<i>Fregata minor</i>	Floreana Mockingbird (E)	<i>Mimus trifasciatus</i>
Blue-footed Booby	<i>Sula nebulosus</i>	Hood Mockingbird (E)	<i>Mimus macdonaldi</i>
Nazca Booby	<i>Sula granti</i>	S. Christobel Mockingbird (E)	<i>Mimus melanotis</i>
Red-footed Booby	<i>Sula sula</i>	Mangrove Warbler	<i>Setophaga petechia</i>
Flightless Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax harrisi</i>	Large Ground Finch (E)	<i>Geospiza magnirostris</i>
Galapagos Hawk (E)	<i>Buteo galapagoensis</i>	Medium Ground Finch (E)	<i>Geospiza fortis</i>
Purple Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio martinicus</i>	Small Ground Finch (E)	<i>Geospiza fuliginosa</i>
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Sharp-beaked Ground Finch (E)	<i>Geospiza difficilis</i>
American Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus palliatus</i>	Common Cactus Finch (E)	<i>Geospiza scandens</i>
Black-necked Stilt	<i>Himantopus mexicanus</i>	Large Cactus Finch (E)	<i>Geospiza conirostris</i>
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	Vegetarian Finch (E)	<i>Platyspiza crassirostris</i>
Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>	Small Tree Finch (E)	<i>Camarhynchus parvulus</i>
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	Woodpecker Finch (E)	<i>Camarhynchus pallidus</i>
Wandering Tattler	<i>Tringa incana</i>	Grey Warbler-finch (E)	<i>Certhidea fusca</i>
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		

At the end of the fortnight we had learned a lot about vulcanism, evolution and conservation. We had seen a remarkable number of habitats and got very close to many remarkable species, and had had a really good time which was worth every penny. As we came to the end, I realised that before we arrived I had been nursing a nagging worry that we would decide that we had left our visit 30 years too late and that “...it had all been ruined.” As we left, I realised that exactly the opposite is the case. Although the Park is under pressure from a growing population and, in particular, illegal fishing, visitor numbers are mostly under control. Visitors are very carefully regulated and the money from entry fees<sup>5</sup>, as well as that from the UN, has been used to reverse the negative impact caused by man. Feral cats, goats, deer and donkeys have been essentially eliminated and work continues on the rats. In 2010, the World Heritage Committee removed the archipelago from the list of sites in danger - a clear sign of progress.

So if you are considering a visit to the Galapagos, I would urge you to contact a competent agent<sup>6</sup> and go. I'd be happy to offer advice.

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<sup>1</sup> The standard units of area are the Football Pitch, Isle of Wight, Wales and France. The Falkland Islands are ½ a Wales.

<sup>2</sup> There are 2 endemic bat species and 4 endemic rice rat species limited to certain islands.

<sup>3</sup> For ease of reading I have put Latin names only in the checklist at the end.

<sup>4</sup> BN Dolphins are smaller in the tropics and I understand some taxonomic splitting may be in the pipeline.

<sup>5</sup> Most visitors pay \$100 regardless of the length of visit.

<sup>6</sup> We were greatly assisted by Reef and Rainforest of Totnes and their specialist, John Melton, the son of a naval officer.



Plate 54. RMS *St Helena* at anchor off Jamestown, St Helena.

## The last-ever voyage of a royal mail ship

by Simon Cook

(Photographs by the author)

At 17.40 on Wednesday, 24 January 2018 *RMS St. Helena* left Cape Town on her last voyage. After many years of service, it was a journey that would take her to St. Helena and Ascension Island for the last time. Once back in Cape Town, a long and historic tradition of Royal Mail Ships serving the empire and, latterly, British Overseas Territories (including the even more remote Tristan da Cunha) would finally end.

Problems with the new airport on St Helena had unexpectedly extended the life of the *RMS*, as she was affectionately known, from 2016 to early 2018. My wife and I had booked our passage many months previously, on what was then to be the penultimate voyage, but following the introduction of the much-delayed air link with South Africa the schedule was amended and we found ourselves on the final voyage.

Once all the passengers were embarked we were able to watch the celebrations on the dock below us. There were flag-waving crowds, a pipe band, the parading and handing-over to the captain of a special pennant (one foot in length for every year of service) and a cloud of red, white and blue confetti. The ship was bedecked in bunting and we had lots of confetti and flags as well. In addition to all this I was also able to keep an eye open for birds but due to gale-force winds in the outer harbour and Table Bay there were very few to be seen.



The passage to St. Helena took several days and my wife and I spent as much time out on deck as possible. Although the bridge was closed to passengers the wings were open and they provided the best place for observation. As I rather expected, there were comparatively few birds but there were nevertheless some very interesting sightings. Perhaps the most exciting were the cetaceans, with the very rarely-seen whales on 25 January being one of the highlights of the entire trip.

- 25/1: Great-winged Petrel *Pterodroma macroptera* 38, Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* 44, Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus* 8, Shy Albatross *Thalassarche cauta* 2, Shepherd's Beaked Whale *Tasmacetus shepherdi* 3, Flying Squid *Todarodes pacificus* 14.
- 26/1: Great-winged Petrel 28, Spectacled Petrel *Procellaria conspicillata* 2, Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris* 1.
- 27/1: Great-winged Petrel 1, Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* 1, Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa* 1, St Helena-type storm-petrel 5, Short-beaked Common Dolphin *Delphinus delphis* 6, Cuvier's Beaked Whale *Ziphius cavirostris* 2, flying squid 10.
- 28/1: Cory's Shearwater 3, storm-petrel sp. 2, Leach's Storm-petrel 1, Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii* 3, Grey/Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius* 1, Short-finned Pilot Whale *Globecephala macrorhynchus* 30+, almost certain Blainville's Beaked Whale *Mesoplodon densirostris* 2, False Killer Whale *Pseudorca crassidens* 3–4.
- 29/1: on the approach to Jamestown: St Helena Storm-petrel 6, White Tern *Gygis alba* 105, Black Noddy *Anous minutus* 4, Brown Noddy *A. stolidus* 7, Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* 1, Red-billed Tropicbird 1, Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* 1, Brown Booby *S. leucogaster* 1, Short-finned Pilot Whale ca. 10, Rough-toothed (?) Dolphin female & calf *Steno bredanensis*, Green Turtle *Chelonia mydas* 1.

The quay at Jamestown was packed with sightseers and those waiting for relatives, friends and paying guests alike. My wife and I were taken to our self-catering accommodation at the upper end of Jamestown for our 11-day stay. Meanwhile, once all the island's cargo had been unloaded the RMS sailed for Ascension Island, where the process was repeated, before the ship returned to St. Helena.

My wife had never been to the island before so, using my extensive local knowledge, I was able to act as her (unpaid!) tour guide. We rented a car for £15 per day, which meant that we were able to drive, mostly in second gear, all around the hilly island. My previous visits had been relatively short ones with cruise ship passengers so on this occasion it was much more relaxing and I was able to see many places and parts of the island that there had been no time, or opportunity, to see before. We took in all the usual tourist sights: the Georgian architecture of Jamestown, the museum, the 699 steps of Jacob's Ladder, the two Napoleon houses, his burial place, the new airport and Plantation House, the Governor's residence. Lesser-known sites included the Millennium Forest (planted native trees), Diana's Peak (the highest point on the island) and the donkey sanctuary. Unfortunately, due to an outbreak of influenza, we were unable to visit the coffee plantation and, even worse, the distillery. Happily, its products, including the famous gin in the distinctive stepped bottle, were available elsewhere!

Apart from the breeding seabirds, the only native bird left on the island is the endemic St. Helena Plover *Charadrius sanctaehelenae*. Conservation efforts have seen the population increase to the high hundreds so we saw them in a number of different



Plate 55. Juvenile St Helena Plover - photographed from a car.

places. Often wary of people, they are much more tolerant of cars and that was the best way to get close views of these enigmatic birds. The other landbirds, such as partridges, pheasants, waxbills, canaries and doves are all introduced and can mostly be seen very easily. One of my favourites is the Java Sparrow *Lonchura oryzivora* and there was often a small flock around the chicken coop at our lodgings.

Due to unusually choppy conditions it wasn't until our last day that my wife and I were able to get out in a boat,

hoping to see Whale Sharks *Rhincodon typus*, which come to the island, it is believed, to breed. The largest of all the fish, they often spend long periods at the surface feeding on plankton with their metre-wide mouths. This year only a handful had been recorded (50+ in 2017) but our luck was in, for we saw two or three close to Jamestown, one of which swam slowly right past the boat. We quickly jumped off the boat and snorkelled with the shark, which I estimated to be about eight metres long. What a way to end our time on the island!



Plate 56. Whale Shark and escort.

On her return from Ascension the *St Helena* stayed at anchor for a few more days to allow various special events to take place. Among them were lots of visits by islanders to the ship, a reception for the crew at Plantation House, a parade and a commemorative service in Jamestown. There were flags everywhere, 'end of an era' displays and tributes in numerous windows, features in the local papers, interviews on the radio, more parades and a festival on the waterfront. On the day of departure, a large crowd gathered to see the ship off for the last time. It was a very emotional and, for some, a very tearful event. A flotilla of small boats packed with people circled the ship before and just after it weighed anchor; the very last to leave us were people on jet-skis.

Towards the end of the voyage to Cape Town there were more events on the ship. These included the handing out of special 'Final Voyage' certificates and photographs of the ship and the formal lowering of the flag of a working Royal Mail Ship for the last time. Sadly, the purpose-built *St Helena* faces an uncertain future, for no buyer has so far been found, so scrapping is a distinct possibility.

Once again, the time at sea yielded numerous wildlife sightings with the following noted.

- 10/2: St. Helena Storm-petrel 20+, White Tern many, Masked Booby 1, Black Noddy ca. 30, Brown Noddy 6, Red-billed Tropicbird 6, Rough-toothed Dolphin 10, Green Turtle 1, Whale Shark 1 - a big one!
- 11/2: Storm-petrel sp. 2, St. Helena Storm-petrel 1, Leach's Storm-petrel 2, Bulwer's Petrel 3, White Tern 12, Cory's Shearwater 2, flying squid 60, Short-finned Pilot Whale 2.
- 12/2: Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus* 1, White Tern 200+, Red-billed Tropicbird 8, Brown Noddy 8, Black Noddy 54, Masked Booby 11, St. Helena Storm-petrel 2, flying squid ca. 40, Whale Shark - another big one.
- 13/2: Cory's Shearwater 3, Red-billed Tropicbird 1, storm-petrel sp. 3, dolphin sp. ca. 20.
- 14/2: Cory's Shearwater 1, storm-petrel sp. 2, Short-beaked Common Dolphin 10-12.
- 15/2: Great-winged Petrel 22, Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross *Thalassarche chlororhynchos* 2, Cory's Shearwater 3, storm-petrel sp. 2, Short-beaked Common Dolphin 10-12, Green (?) Turtle 1, flying squid 1.
- 16/2: Cory's Shearwater 142, storm-petrel sp. 21, Long-tailed Skua 4, Leach's Storm-petrel 5, Brown Skua 2, Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* 2, Grey/Red-necked Phalarope 1, yellow-nosed/black-browed albatross 1.

Our voyage ended spectacularly on the morning of the 17th February, and unlike our departure, the sea was like glass and the sky was cloudless, so Table Mountain could be seen from a distance of many miles. However, it wasn't just the scenery and the weather that were spectacular - the wildlife was too. 'Early birds' included 3 Sooty Shearwaters *Ardenna grisea*, 1 Cape Gannet *Morus capensis* and a single White-chinned petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis*. Not far away was a feeding frenzy of birds - thousands of Cape Cormorants *Phalacrocorax capensis* (going past us in streams), gulls (*Hartlaub's Croicocephalus hartlaubii* and Kelp *Larus dominicanus*) and various terns. There were also small groups of 5, 9 and 2 African Penguins *Spheniscus demersus*. Added to this was an Ocean Sunfish *Mola mola* beside the hull, a Southern Right Whale *Eubalaena australis* further away, 20+ Dusky Dolphins *Lagenorhynchus obscuris* zipping past us at high speed and, on the last-ever voyage of a Royal Mail Ship, my long-anticipated and first-ever Heaviside's Dolphins *Cephalorhynchus heavisidii*. Brilliant!

Simon Cook

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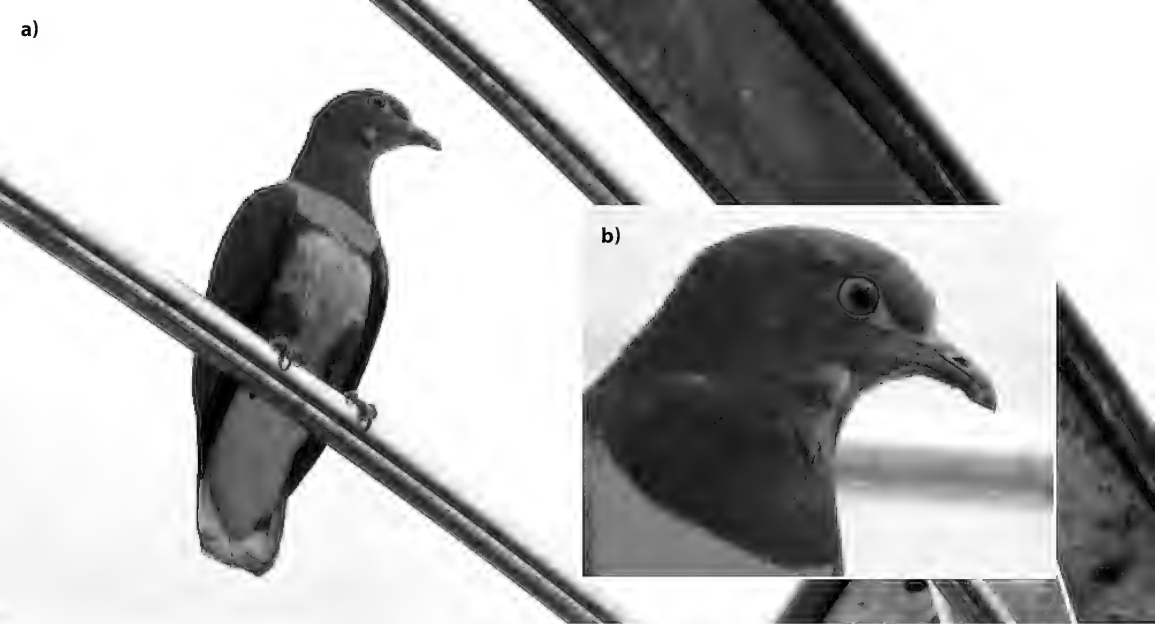


Plate 57 a-b. Yellow-fronted Fruit Dove. © T Hiney

## Yellow-fronted fruit dove, Honiara, Solomon Islands

by Tom Hiney

In February 2018 I was working as the resident birder on the *Caledonian Sky* on passage from New Zealand to Rabaul, Papua New Guinea. Whilst sailing into Honiara on the island of Guadalcanal for a morning visit I was called from my cabin to the lido deck as two 'green pigeons' had been reported. Upon arriving I quickly realised they were Yellow-bibbed Fruit Doves *Ptilinopus solomensis*. They were quite spectacular - a rare treat for us to see them at such close range. One of the birds had settled into the rafters of the lido deck, an open but partially roofed dining area while the other was perched on a guardrail. Both seemed in good health, were not at all fussed by the tourists taking their photos, and they stayed with us until we berthed.

Later, on that very evening I was shown a copy of *Sea Swallow* 65(2016) by passenger and RNBWS member Malcolm Calvert. This was the first time I had seen the magazine and lo and behold it had an article by Simon Cook describing two similar meetings with Yellow-bibbed Fruit Doves a couple of years earlier - same place, same

time of year, same time of day - and his events happened two years in a row!

I quickly contacted both Simon and the editor of *Sea Swallow* to report this third occurrence of hitch-hiking fruit doves. Where they originally came from and quite when they first arrived on the ship we don't know, but clearly a ship is a good hitch-hike route to Honiara.

It also made me think of a time on 29 December 2016 whilst on the *Island Sky*, another small expedition cruise ship, in the Indian Ocean. We were in Laamu Atoll in the Maldives when I sighted an Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster* on one of the islands (Vadinolhu), a long way from home. The island was uninhabited as far as we could see; there was a failed hotel operation but no people.

I searched the bird list for Maldives and found no mention of it and tried to contact a bird association or equivalent but with no success. Perhaps *Sea Swallow* is the place for sharing this unusual observation too?

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**Plate 58.** Oriental Darter. © T Hiney

### Comment by the editor

There is one previous record of Oriental Darter from the Maldives (Anderson *et al.*, 2011) and so this is only the second record.

### References

Anderson RC, Rasheed S, Rilwan A & Hofmeister A (2011). First records of five species for the Maldives. *BirdingASIA*, 16: 41–43.

## An Ascension Frigatebird at St Helena - the first record?

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by Simon Cook

Since 2008 I have been an almost annual migrant to St Helena, and have always aimed to go out on a local boat in search of seabirds and other wildlife, usually along the north-western coast and, if not too choppy, go round a seabird rock stack called Speery Island.

In April 2015 I went out on two boat trips, and on the first, whilst going around this tiny island, I and the other birders were amazed to see an immature Ascension Frigatebird, *Fregata aquila*, high above us. At the time I only had a compact camera with me but I was able to get some pictures, despite the fact

**Plate 59.** Ascension Frigatebird, St Helena. © S Cook





Plate 60. Speery Island. © S Cook

that the boat was rolling heavily. The frigatebird was circling the island, much as they do at Boatswainbird Island at Ascension Island. Soon, however, it was lost to sight, but we saw it again at Speery Island the following day. It is perhaps no coincidence that both Speery and Boatswainbird are rock stacks with large numbers of breeding seabirds, situated just off the main island.

The principal reference work that I have is St Helena and Ascension Island: a natural history (Philip and Myrtle Ashmole, Anthony Nelson, Oswestry, 2000). On page 94 it is stated, "The fragmentary historical record of the birds of St Helena is tantalizing in many ways. For instance, frigatebirds no longer breed on St Helena, but in his account of the island published in 1817 J Barnes described: *"the frigate pelican, or man of war, pelicanus aquilus"* as a large, dark-coloured bird, in length from three to four feet, and ten to fourteen feet in width, from the extremities of the wings". These dimensions are somewhat exaggerated but probably refer to the Great Frigatebird, fossils of which have been found on the main island of St Helena. Melliss in 1875 wrote of the *"Man-of-war-bird"* and recorded that there was still *"living evidence of its once having frequented the landing steps at Jamestown"*.

In 1956 Bill Bourne published a description of a seabird skull collected on St Helena and commented: *"It seems probable that the original seabird community of the island once included some or all of the tropical Boobies, Terns, Tropic-birds and Frigate-birds still found at Ascension and South Trinidade to the north and west..."* On page 98: "It was eventually possible to demonstrate the presence in the bone deposits of several of the seabirds that still breed on the island or adjacent islets, together with four species that no longer breed there, but do so elsewhere in the Atlantic: Audubon's Shearwater, White-faced Storm-petrel, Red-footed Booby and Lesser Frigatebird."

There is no mention of Ascension Frigatebird from the fossil records and the chapter on the birds of St Helena and Ascension makes no mention of Ascension Frigatebird having been recorded on St Helena. Although I subsequently sent details and a photograph to the St Helena National Trust, I did not receive the promised response about any previous occurrences, so it may well be that the occurrence of a bird in 2015 is the first recorded for the island.

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# Black Noddy *Anous minutus* in Hong Kong - a first record for mainland China

by RW Lewthwaite, CH Wan & MC Woo

(Photographs by the Michelle and Peter Wong)

The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) conducts annual summer surveys of breeding terns on the islands around Hong Kong on behalf of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) of the Hong Kong SAR Government. The programme involves weekly boat surveys of all islands to the east and south of Hong Kong counting breeding terns, which are predominantly Bridled *Onychoprion fuscatus*, Black-naped *Sterna sumatrana* and Roseate *S. dougallii*.

On the morning of 18 June 2017, we were taking part in an HKBWS / AFCD tern survey in an AFCD boat along a fixed transect from Ma Liu Shui to Wong Shek pier through the Mirs Bay area of eastern Hong Kong waters. We had reached Kung Chau island which holds an active tern colony of all three main terns. There was quite a swell and at low speeds our boat constantly vibrated and juddered, so it was difficult to get a steady image through binoculars. However, whilst scanning the

rocks, we came across a strange, dark tern with a highly contrasting white cap, perched on a low rock just below and to the right of some nesting Black-naped Terns. This was clearly a Noddy of some sort and photographs taken then and the following day showed it to be an adult Black Noddy *Anous minutus*, a first record of this species in Hong Kong and mainland China.

There are no other records for mainland China, but there is one Taiwan record, off the coast of San-Hsien-tai, Taitung on 18 May 2013 (Robson 2013).

Gochberg & Burger (1996) indicate that Black Noddy is widely distributed on tropical islands in the western Pacific Ocean south to the east coast of Australia and across the Atlantic Ocean; they recognise seven subspecies, which differ from each other only slightly, mainly in plumage tone and in size. The subspecies occurring closest to the coast of China are:

Plate 61. Black Noddy.





Plate 62. Black Noddy with Roseate and Black-naped Terns.

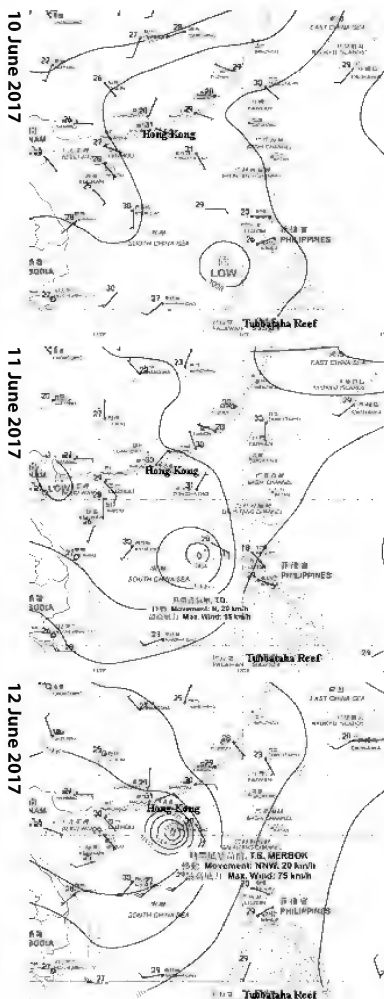


Figure 1. Daily weather charts from Hong Kong Observatory, 10–12 June 2017.

- *worcesteri* of Tubbataha Reef in the Sulu Sea, Philippines;
- *marcusi* of Minami Tori-shima (Marcus Island) southeast to Wake Island and south through Micronesia to the Caroline Islands.

The passage of Tropical Storm *Merbok* through the South China Sea from the Philippines into Hong Kong the previous week, as shown in these daily Weather Charts from the HK Observatory from 10 to 12 June 2017, strongly suggest this bird is ssp *worcesteri* from Tubbataha Reef.

Other unusual Hong Kong seabird sightings following TS *Merbok* were seven Lesser Frigatebirds *Fregata ariel* in a single group and a Japanese Cormorant *Phalacrocorax capillatus*, all in the same area as the Black Noddy. These records are typical of wind-blown seabirds in Hong Kong waters following tropical storms in summer and autumn.

In a recent issue of *Forktail*, Jensen & Songco (2016) show that numbers of the ssp *worcesteri* on the Tubbataha Reef are increasing, with 10,656 adults counted in May 2013. Birds breed there mainly from late April to August and also in September–October.

## References

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# Seabird reports for 2018

by Captain Stephen Chapman, MN, Seabird Recorder

For many years *Sea Swallow* has published an annual summary of the report sheets from observers at sea, this after the seabird recorder has thumbed through pages of records and selected those that represented a story: voyages to remote places, feeding flocks, large concentrations of birds, less frequently seen species, extra-limital sightings, etc. In recent years they have also been put onto the RNBWS database, and it is to that database that researchers now go, rather than *Sea Swallow*. For that reason I have ceased to attempt to summarise in print the volumes of data that come in from the observers at sea, and the time and effort saved are now used to load the records on to the database - records that are then instantly available for access worldwide.

So this year we make a change in *Sea Swallow*. We list the observers and their voyages and their activity, plus any highlights of the year, but without the pages listing details of species, positions, observers and dates, all of which can be found online. You can search by observer name, species or ship name. If the demand arises we can add other filters and search criteria. If you want to study a particular species or area, please ask. The records can be extracted and the data set sent to you without any trouble.

Please continue sending your records to: [data@rnbws.org.uk](mailto:data@rnbws.org.uk). Thank you.

## Selected seabird highlights from the ornithological press

Seabirds seem to be generating increased interest around the world. Easy travel, cruise ship voyages and offshore small boat pelagic

**Table 1.** In the year 2017 reports of seabirds at sea were received from the following observers.

### David Ballance

(i) *MV Balmoral*

Southampton, Iberia and the western Mediterranean, North Atlantic Southampton, April. Highlights were Audouin's Gulls *Ichthyophaga audouinii* in the Balearics and a feeding cluster of Northern Gannets *Morus bassanus* (260 ad, 170 intermediate plumage) at around 38N, 9.7W.

(ii) *MV Black Watch*

Norway, Spitzbergen, Iceland Greenland and the Faeroes, July. Paper reports and detailed notes.

### Lieutenant Philip Boak

*HMS Echo*

in the Mediterranean, March–May. Excel files. Gulls only.

### Malcolm Calvert

(i) *MV Maasdam*

(ii) *MV Zaandam*

San Diego, Mexico, Panama, Manta, Salaverry and Callao, February–March.

Rio de Janeiro, Punta del Este, Buenos Aires, Ushuaia, Port Stanley, Punta Arenas, Puerto Montt, San Antonio, November. Listing and notes port-by-port but value of observations diminished without at-sea positions.

### Stephen Chapman

*MV Mont St Michel*  
& *MV Normandie*

Portsmouth, Caen, Portsmouth, May–June. Excel files.

### Simon Cook

(i) *MV Le Soleil*

(ii) *MV Plancius*

Antarctica, South Georgia to Uruguay, February.

Ushuaia, South Georgia, Gough Island, Tristan da Cunha, St. Helena, Ascension Island, Cape Verde Islands, February–April.

(iii) *MV Caledonian Sky*

(iv) *MV Silver Explorer*

Multiple voyages between Darwin and Broome, July–August.

St Johns, St John NB, Newport, NYC, Norfolk, Charleston, Nassau, Havana, Cienfuegos, Cartagena, Panama, Bahia Solano, Isla de la Plata, Machala, Guayaquil, September, October. On watch records on Excel files plus paper reports and notes for periods off watch.

cruising is making what was the preserve of the deep-sea mariner accessible to twitchers. At-sea observations by research teams focused on specifics are bringing a mass of new information. Below are a few highlights from the bird press in the year 2017. If I miss any you think should be here please let me know.

## **Oceanic range of the Bermuda Petrel *Pterodroma cahow***

(Reference: Dobson A and Madeiros J (2017) *Important Bird Areas: Bermuda*. British Birds 110: 155–172).

The oceanic range of the Bermuda Petrel, or Cahow, is plotted from geolocator tracking studies in a paper focused on Bermuda and its status as an IBA. Bermuda is a UK Overseas Territory and was uninhabited before being settled by the British over 400 years ago. It is one of the most isolated inhabited islands in the world, but in spite of its remoteness and its suburban landscape, it has a remarkable avian richness and history. The rediscovery of the breeding grounds of the Cahow in 1951 made international news, and the continuing success of the Cahow recovery programme by translocating chicks to burrows at a higher location provides hope for similar projects elsewhere. At the Nonsuch colony a record 16 breeding pairs produced 10 chicks in 2016. Geolocators show Cahows to range up to 3,000 nm northeast and reach within 85–110 nm of southwest Ireland and northwest Spain.

## **Year-round movements of a small seabird and oceanic isotopic gradient in the tropical Atlantic**

(Reference: Zajková Z, Militão T & González-Solis J (2017). *Year-round movements of a small seabird and oceanic isotopic gradient in the tropical Atlantic*. Mar Ecol Prog Ser 579: 169–183).

Despite the proliferation of seabird tracking studies, there is a relative paucity of studies on small tropical seabirds. The study by Zuzana Zajková *et al.* presents for the first time the distribution and movements of the little-known Boyd's Shearwater *Puffinus boydi*, an endemic to the Cape Verde Islands. The researchers tracked 28 birds from two breeding sites (Ilhéu Raso and Ilhéu de Cima) with geolocator loggers from 2007 to

2012. Birds migrated on average 785 nm westward, to the central Atlantic Ocean (5.3N, 30.7W), where they stayed on average 114 days, from May to August.

## **South Georgian Diving-petrel**

(Reference: Rollinson DP, Cardwell P, De Blocq A & Nicolau JR (2017) *Out-of-range sighting of a South Georgian Diving-petrel *Pelecanoides georgicus* in the southeast Atlantic Ocean*. Marine Ornithology 45: 21–22).

At-sea identification of diving-petrels is very difficult so little is known about their distribution away from their breeding islands. On 25 July 2016 a single South Georgian Diving-petrel *Pelecanoides georgicus* was found on one of the upper decks of the SA *Agulhas II*. The bird was injured and soon died, probably after colliding with the ship during the night at approximately 44S, 7E, and identification was confirmed by detailed examination. This record represents a considerable range extension of the species and the farthest from its breeding islands to be confirmed. It suggests that diving-petrels disperse farther from breeding islands than previously known.

## **New Zealand Storm-petrel**

(Reference: Flood RL & Wilson AC (2017) *A New Zealand Storm Petrel *Fregetta maoriana* off Gau Island, Fiji, in May 2017*. Bull BOC 137(3): 278–286).

A sighting of the Critically Endangered New Zealand Storm-petrel *Fregetta maoriana* was made during a pelagic expedition in May 2017 off Gau Island, Fiji. This is the first confirmed record of this recently rediscovered species away from New Zealand and provides evidence of long-distance dispersal by failed or non-breeders to tropical waters. It expands the known range by some thousand miles north. The paper includes some stunning photographs and a review of the 'streaked storm-petrels' of the Pacific Ocean.

On 20 May 2017, about 26 miles south-west of Gau airport, at 18.4S 179.1E, a New Zealand Storm-petrel visited a chumming slick during both the morning and afternoon sessions.

## Observations of five little-known tubenoses from Melanesia in January 2017

(Reference: Flood RL, Wilson AC & Zufelt K (2017) *Observations of five little-known tubenoses from Melanesia in January 2017*. Bull BOC 137(3): 226–236).

The paper presents observations of five little-known tubenoses made during a pelagic expedition from Vanuatu to New Ireland, Melanesia, in January 2017: Beck's Petrel *Pseudobulweria becki*, an all-dark *Pseudobulweria*, Magnificent Petrel *Pterodroma (brevipes) magnificens*, Vanuatu Petrel *P. (cervicalis) occulta* and Heinroth's Shearwater *Puffinus heinrothi*. The observations provide some new insights into the following issues: Beck's Petrel—timing of breeding and search for the breeding grounds; all-dark *Pseudobulweria*—possible existence of an undescribed taxon in seas north-east of Papua New Guinea; Magnificent Petrel—sightings consistent with the argument for a distinct population; Vanuatu Petrel—variation in the underwing pattern and implications for its separation from White-necked Petrel *Pterodroma (c.) cervicalis*; and Heinroth's Shearwater—timing of breeding and search for the breeding grounds.

## Noteworthy seabird records from Paraná state, southern Brazil

(Reference: Daudt NW, Pereira A, Rechetelo J, Krul R & Mestre LAM (2017) *Noteworthy seabird records from Paraná state, southern Brazil*. Bull BOC 137(3): 195–205).

A team analysed the records of seabird specimens - skeletons and skins - collected during beach surveys of Paraná, south Brazil (both the mainland coast and offshore islets) from 1992–94, a total of 184 specimens from four orders and 17 species. This represents the most important collection of seabirds from Paraná and includes three new records for the state, Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris borealis*, Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus* and Snowy Shearwater *Chionis albus*. The team recommend the removal of two species from the avifauna of Paraná—Shy Albatross *Thalassarche cauta* and Broad-billed Prion *Pachyptila vittata*—due to the lack of tangible evidence.

## Antarctic Tern *Sterna vittata* - the second and third documented records in Brazil

(Reference: Carlos CJ, Daudt NW, Grouw Hein van & Neves T (2017) *The second and third documented records of Antarctic Tern *Sterna vittata* in Brazil*. Bull BOC 137: 320–324).

Antarctic Tern *Sterna vittata* breeds during the austral spring and summer (October–March) on islands in the Southern Ocean, from 37S on the Tristan da Cunha archipelago, to 68S on the Antarctic Peninsula. Some populations remain near their breeding grounds year-round, whereas others migrate north to waters off Argentina, South Africa and New Zealand. Vagrants have been reported as far north as Walvis Bay in Namibia, southern Australia and south-east Brazil. The current paper (Carlos *et al.* 2017) presents new documented records and reviews the existing evidence for the occasional presence of Antarctic Tern in Brazil. For example, on 3 September 2012 a single tern was photographed from FV *Maria Letícia*, a pelagic long-liner operating about ninety miles off the state of Rio Grande do Sul (c34.1S, 51.3W).

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# Landbirds from ships at sea

by Captain Stephen Chapman MN



Plate 63. Cattle Egret. © P Boak

The last report on landbirds at sea was provided by Lieutenant Chris Patrick in *Sea Swallow* 64: 86–88. This report therefore, while referring mainly to the year 2017, also includes data dating back to 2014 from Simon Cook's voyages working as a lecturer and naturalist on board expedition cruise ships. Some data is in tabular format so that the records can be readily imported into the online global database, and if you think there are omissions here please let me know and I'll dig deeper into the files. This report, by the way, does not replicate the extensive sightings of Yellow-bibbed Fruit Doves *Ptilinopus solomonensis* (*Sea Swallow* 65: 84–85 and on page 66 of this issue, or the Lapland Bunting (*Sea Swallow* 66: 77); or the sightings of a Peregrine Falcon (*Sea Swallow* 66: 76).

**Table 1.** Reports of landbirds at sea were received from the following observers.

<b>David Ballance (DB)</b>	
(i) MV <i>Serenissima</i>	in the Mediterranean, October–November 2014.
(ii) MV <i>Balmoral</i>	North Atlantic, April 2017.
(iii) MV <i>Black Watch</i>	North Atlantic, July 2017.
<b>Lieutenant Philip Boak (PB)</b>	
HMS <i>Echo</i>	in the Mediterranean, March–May. (see also <i>Sea Swallow</i> 66 p57–58)
<b>Malcolm Calvert (MC)</b>	
MV <i>Zaandam</i>	Rio de Janeiro, Punta del Este, Buenos Aires, Ushuaia, Port Stanley, Punta Arenas, Puerto Montt, San Antonio, November 2017.
<b>Simon Cook (SC)</b>	
(i) MV <i>Le Boreal</i>	Ushuaia, Falkland Islands, South Georgia, Antarctic Peninsula, November–December 2014.
(ii) MV <i>Le Soleal</i>	Ushuaia, Antarctic Peninsula, December 2014.
(iii) MV <i>Caledonian Sky</i>	New Zealand to Borneo, January–February 2015.
(iv) MV <i>Plancius</i>	Ushuaia to Antarctica, Cape Verde, March–April 2015.
(v) MV <i>Silver Discoverer</i>	Nome (Alaska), Bering Island, Kamchatka, Sea of Japan, South Korea, Keelung (Taiwan), August–September 2015.
(vi) MV <i>Silver Explorer</i>	St John, NB, Philadelphia, Norfolk, Nassau, Cuba, Panama, Valparaíso, September–November 2016. (see report in <i>Sea Swallow</i> 66 p59–66 and analysis of Peregrines and Gyr Falcons at sea in <i>Sea Swallow</i> 66 p72–75)
(vii) MV <i>Le Soleal</i>	Antarctica, South Georgia to Uruguay, February 2017.
(viii) MV <i>Plancius</i>	Ushuaia, South Georgia, Gough Island, Tristan da Cunha, St. Helena, Ascension Island, Cape Verde Islands, February–April 2017.
(ix) MV <i>Silver Explorer</i>	St Johns, St John NB, Newport, NYC, Norfolk, Charleston, Nassau, Havana, Cienfuegos, Cartagena, Panama, Bahia Solano, Isla de la Plata, Machala, Guayaquil, September–October 2017.
<b>WO1 Tony Tindale (TT)</b>	
HMS <i>Protector</i>	in the North Atlantic, May 2013.

## Assisted Passages

Many of Simon Cook's landbird sightings were close to the coasts but if one wanted an example of ship assisted passages in the Southern Ocean (a phenomenon well documented in the North Atlantic, and also reported by Keith Betton in this issue of *Sea Swallow*) then the reports of egrets fit the bill. The birds came aboard MV *Plancius* on a voyage from the Antarctic Peninsula to South Georgia early on 31 March 2015. At first two, then four, then five Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis* approached the ship from astern and finally settled on the monkey bridge. Later three more egrets, one of which was a Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*, landed on board 144 nm SSW of the Willis Islands, at the western end of South Georgia. It seems likely that these egrets came from South America - Argentina or Chile - where they are common breeders to 40S. (On a voyage around South America Malcolm Calvert had noted Snowy Egrets in Montevideo, Punta del Este and on the west coast in Puerto Montt).

All birds were still in place at 13.00, and next day all were seen at 07.30, when the ship was in the Bay of Isles. When the Zodiac went ashore in Fortuna Bay there was one Cattle Egret on the rocks and around midday an egret was seen flying ashore at Grytviiken whaling station, but at 13.15 in Fortuna Bay two Cattles and the Snowy were still on the monkey bridge. The night of the 2nd/3rd and most of the 3rd was spent at anchor in Jason Harbour and it would seem that all birds left the ship of their own accord at South Georgia. Both species have previously been recorded there, though we have no evidence of breeding.

More sightings of Cattle Egret were to come. Back at sea on 6 April, one was seen on the monkey bridge at noon at 46.8S, 21.3W. Then at 21.40 Simon saw two birds on the TV in his cabin (there is a forward-facing CCTV camera on the foremast which is connected to the cabin TV system). The birds were illuminated by the searchlights, which were on throughout the day because of the presence of icebergs. The approx. position was 45.5S, 18W. Next day one was aboard roosting between kayaks that were underneath the stacked Zodiacs and at 12.00 at 44.1S, 15.9W was still present.

To put these sightings in context one needs to refer to the recent distribution summary

(Woods, 2017) for Snowy Egret: widely vagrant, to the Magellan Straits (52S), Tristan da Cunha and South Georgia; while Cattle Egret are noted in all continents except Antarctica, spreading through post breeding dispersal and long-distance vagrancy. This vagrancy is clearly borne out when looking at 20 records in the RNBWS database totalling 106 birds south of 50S in longitude 36W–61W over the years 1986–98. Bill Curtis on RFA *Grey Rover* reported 18 on Flat Jason Island on 30 April 1992 plus sightings at four other places in the Falklands (*Sea Swallow* 43: 23). At Grytviiken, Bourne and Curtis reported four birds in March 1986.

## Migrant Passerines off SW Hokkaido

An early start on 1 September off south west Hokkaido enabled Simon Cook to connect with a variety of migrating passerines. Not afraid to record observations he could not identify to species, seven probable *locustella* warblers were flushed from deck at 05.05; then three warblers and two White Wagtails *Motacilla alba* were seen flying around. A stubtail (one of the Old World warblers) on the bridge-wing looking at first like a large brown moth fluttering up against the bridge windows was, with excellent close views, identified as an Asian Stubtail *Urosphena squameiceps* before it flew off. The ship was 15 nm offshore at 41.1N, 139.1E.

An immature Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope* was seen at close range but very flighty, at 05.43 at 41.8N, 139.8E. Looking down the starboard side from the bridge wing Simon saw a Gray's (Grasshopper) Warbler *Helopsaltes fasciolatus* land on a rope going underneath the lifeboat. It then flitted down to the deck to give further views.

Next at 05.58 a Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* and two White Wagtails and two warblers crossed the bow, all going east at 41.7N, 139.8E. A pipit species flew over at 06.51 at 41.4N, 139.9E, making a single call which Simon transcribed as "schreep", so possibly it was a Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*.

At 07.08 an immature male Siberian Blue Robin *Larvivora cyane* landed on a rope just a few feet away - the wings were just starting to turn blue. The ship was at 41.5N, 139.9E, 5 nm off the SW tip of Hokkaido.

Table 1. List of landbirds reported from ships.

Common Name	Latin Name	Observer	Date	Ship	Latitude	Longitude	No	Notes
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	TT	06/05/13	HMS Protector	46.5N	16.7W	1	Very tired
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	DB	30/10/14	Serenissima	36.9N	15.4E	2	on board
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	DB	02/11/14	Serenissima	38.3N	6.1E	1	
Chilean Swallow	<i>Tachycineta leucopyga</i>	SC	18/11/14	Le Boreal	52.3S	51.4W	1	230°E Fl. Feeding on board
Yellow-bibbed Fruit Dove	<i>Phainopepla nitens</i>	SC	21/01/15	Caledonian Sky	10.2S	161.9E	2	See Photos S565 p84-85.
Magpie Goose	<i>Anseranas semipalmata</i>	SC	29/01/15	Caledonian Sky	10.4S	142.2	4	Imm
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	SC	31/03/15	Plancius	56.0S	40.4W	7	Scotia Sea
Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	SC	31/03/15	Plancius	56.0S	40.4W	1	Scotia Sea
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	SC	04/04/15	Plancius	51.8S	30.7W	2	250° NE South Georgia
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	SC	06/04/15	Plancius	46.8S	21.3W	1	
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	SC	19/08/15	Silver Discoverer	61.1N	172.7E	1	Off northern Kamchakta
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	SC	19/08/15	Silver Discoverer	60.9N	172.4E	2	Off northern Kamchakta
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	SC	20/08/15	Silver Discoverer	60.1N	166.9E	1	
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	SC	26/08/15	Silver Discoverer	51.2N	157.5E	1	
Grey-tailed Tattler	<i>Heteroscelus brevipes</i>	SC	26/08/15	Silver Discoverer	51.0N	157.1E	1	
Grey-tailed Tattler	<i>Heteroscelus brevipes</i>	SC	27/08/15	Silver Discoverer	49.5N	149.9E	2	Flew around ship for 5 min
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	SC	28/08/15	Silver Discoverer	47.8N	144.4E	1	Off southern Sakhalin Is.
Grey-tailed Tattler	<i>Heteroscelus brevipes</i>	SC	06/09/15	Silver Discoverer	36.0N	130.1E	6	In flight going E.
Magellanic Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus leucopodus</i>	SC	01/02/17	Le Soled	55.8S	66.0W	1	"Imm. 25 nm E of Barnevelt Is, E of Cape Horn."
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	PB	27/03/17	HMS Echo	34.1N	13.7E	1	On VERTREP deck. Photo S566 p58
Short-eared owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	PB	27/03/17	HMS Echo	34.1N	13.7E	1	In flight around ship.
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	PB	29/03/17	HMS Echo	34.1N	14.6E	1	In flight around ship.
Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	PB	29/03/17	HMS Echo	34.1N	14.3E	1	Hopping around VERTREP deck.
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	PB	30/03/17	HMS Echo	34.0N	14.0E	1	In flight around ship.
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	PB	31/03/17	HMS Echo	34.0N	12.3E	1	"In flight around ship, perching."
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	PB	01/04/17	HMS Echo	34.1N	13.0E	1	In flight around ship.
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	PB	03/04/17	HMS Echo	24.5N	13.2E	1	"In flight around ship, perching"
Eared Dove	<i>Zenaidura macroura</i>	SC	05/04/17	Plancius	46.3S	19.6W	1	558' off Gough Is.
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	DB	08/04/17	Balmoral	37.8N	9.8W	1	
Racing Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	PB	08/04/17	HMS Echo	34.2N	12.5E	11	"In flight around ship, perching"
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	SC	08/04/17	Plancius	39.6S	10.4W	1	37' NW of Gough Is.
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	DB	09/04/17	Balmoral	35.5N	6.1W	1	
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	DB	09/04/17	Balmoral	35.5N	6.1W	1	
Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	DB	09/04/17	Balmoral	35.8N	6.0W	4	3 ad male and 1 juv
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	SC	09/04/17	Plancius	37.3	12.4W	1	"Off Tristan, later seen ashore with cattle"
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	PB	10/04/17	HMS Echo	41.0N	11.7E	1	"Male perched on external fittings, catching flies. Photo S566 p58."
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	PB	10/04/17	HMS Echo	41.0N	11.7E	1	"In flight around ship, perching"
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	PB	10/04/17	HMS Echo	41.2N	11.7E	1	"In flight around ship, perched on seaboat."

Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	PB	10/04/17	HMS Echo	41.0N	11.7E	1	"In flight around ship, perched in bullring of ship. Photo S566 p58."
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	PB	10/04/17	HMS Echo	41.3N	11.8E	1	Perched on 20mm. Photo on file.
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	PB	10/04/17	HMS Echo	41.0N	11.7E	1	"In flight around ship, perching. Photo S566 p58."
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	DB	11/04/17	Balmoral	40.3N	5.3E	1	
Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	PB	19/04/17	HMS Echo	34.1N	13.5E	1	"In flight around ship, perching. Photo S566 p58."
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	PB	21/04/17	HMS Echo	34.0N	12.2E	10	In flight around ship.
Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	PB	21/04/17	HMS Echo	34.0N	12.9E	6	"In flight around ship, perching."
Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	PB	21/04/17	HMS Echo	34.0N	12.2E	3	"In flight around ship, perching."
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	PB	22/04/17	HMS Echo	34.2N	12.9E	1	"Flew inside Bridge. Caught, released. Photo S566 p58."
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	PB	22/04/17	HMS Echo	34.2N	12.9E	1	Sat on deck. Later found dead. Photo on file.
Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	PB	26/04/17	HMS Echo	43.7N	7.4E	1	"Sat below Bridge windows, alongside Monaco. Photo S566 p58."
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	SC	26/04/17	Plancius	8.2N	20.8W	1	Perched on port GPMG. See photo.
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	PB	30/04/17	HMS Echo	37.6N	10.8E	1	
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	DB	20/07/17	Black Watch	67.4N	14.5E	4	
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	DB	30/07/17	Black Watch	60.2N	22.5W	3	
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	SC	16/09/17	Silver Explorer	46.5N	55.5W	1	26' off Newfoundland
Magnolia Warbler	<i>Setophaga magnolia</i>	SC	19/09/17	Silver Explorer	46.7N	60.2W	1	
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	SC	21/09/17	Silver Explorer	44.4N	62.8W	1	19' off Nova Scotia
Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>	SC	26/09/17	Silver Explorer	41.3N	71.1W	1	13' offshore. In very thick fog.
Least Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus exilis</i>	SC	26/09/17	Silver Explorer	41.3N	71.1W	1	13' offshore. In very thick fog.
Virginia Rail	<i>Rallus limicola</i>	SC	26/09/17	Silver Explorer	41.3N	71.1W	1	13' offshore. In very thick fog.
Blackpoll Warbler	<i>Setophaga striata</i>	SC	26/09/17	Silver Explorer	41.3N	71.1W	1	13' offshore. In very thick fog.
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	SC	28/09/17	Silver Explorer	38.9N	74.4W	c10	Off New Jersey pos up to 10 birds
Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>	SC	28/09/17	Silver Explorer	37.5N	75.4W	1	Taken by Peregrine
Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombus cedrorum</i>	SC	28/09/17	Silver Explorer	38.1N	74.9W	1	Circled without landing
Pectoral Sandpiper	<i>Calidris melanotos</i>	SC	28/09/17	Silver Explorer	38.0N	74.9W	1	"13' off Assateague, NJ"
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	SC	06/10/17	Silver Explorer	25.1N	77.4W	1	Approaching Nassau
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	SC	07/10/17	Silver Explorer	24.9N	79.7W	c9	Aprox total from 10.00-19.10
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	SC	12/10/17	Silver Explorer	19.9N	78.0W	1	12' W southern Cuba
Prairie Warbler	<i>Setophaga discolor</i>	SC	12/10/17	Silver Explorer	19.8N	77.8W	1	off southern Cuba
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	SC	14/10/17	Silver Explorer	15.6N	75.8W	2	"145' SSE Morant Point, E Jamaica. One with full crop."
Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	SC	14/10/17	Silver Explorer	16.1N	75.8W	1	"Landed, exhausted, died. 110' SSE Morant Point, Jam"
Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	SC	14/10/17	Silver Explorer	16.0N	75.8W	6	Going south.
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	SC	15/10/17	Silver Explorer	11.1N	75.8W	1	"35' NW Pta Santa Rita, Colombia"

Ten Sand Martins *Riparia riparia*, going south at 07.20 at 41.4N, 139.9E rounded off the watch. At this time of the day none of the birds that landed on the ship seemed to stay for very long: they were each seen once only.

## Bonanza of Blue Rock Thrushes

As an indicator of the attraction that Simon Cook's ship *MV Silver Discoverer* has for birds one can do no better than pick out some of the many Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* sightings in September 2015: 3rd, one on a breakwater at Futami Harbour, Sado Island, off W Honshu; three including a singing male which flew up onto the top of a jib of a dockside crane. Next day one seen on piles of imported logs at Sakaiminato, Honshu. On the 11th one flew to the top of the adjacent Kobe Oriental Hotel and another was seen from the dock as it flew off the ship at the port of Takamatsu. Then on the 15th two were seen on the docked ship from the tour bus returning from a tour to Hagi, Honshu. Next day three were seen from the ship at the dock in Nagsaki, Kyushu and next day two were seen from the ship alongside at Miyanoura, Yakushima. Finally, for this voyage, on the 22nd one was observed flying around the ship at the harbour entrance to Keelung.

## Blizzard of Birds

In 2016 Simon Cook recorded large falls of migrant song birds and herons in the Atlantic, Caribbean and Pacific (off Panama). Highlights from at sea sightings on passage through the Bahamas, Cuba, Colombia and Panama are noted in the table below. The 'blizzard of birds' started in the eastern Pacific on a voyage from Panama City to Guayaquil, Ecuador in the early hours of 19 October 2017, in rain and lightning with a SSW 11- knot wind. At 04.00 *MV Silver Explorer* was at 8N, 78.8W, about 15 nm south of Punta Locos, Isla del Rey; and at 06.00 at 8N, 78.6W. This included New World warblers, tanagers, tyrant flycatchers, thrushes, cardinals, cuckoos and swallows.

The following were recorded on the ship:

**Scarlet Tanager** *Piranga olivacea*, 2 non-breeding males and 3 females

**Red-eyed Vireo** *Vireo olivaceus*, ca. 100 - three landed on Simon!

**Wilson's Warbler** *Cardellina pusilla*, 1

**Eastern Wood-Pewee** *Contopus virens*, 1

**Western Wood-Pewee** *Contopus sordidulus*, 1, seen beside the Eastern so a good comparison could be made

**Yellow-green Vireo** *Vireo flavoviridis*, 2 among the Red-eyed

**Blackburnian Warbler** *Setophaga fusca*, 3 males, 10 females

**Northern Waterthrush** *Parkesia noveboracensis*, 2, looking somewhat out of place on the wet deck

**Swainson's Thrush** *Catharus ustulatus*, 2

**Summer Tanager** *Piranga rubra*, 5 males, 7 females

**Yellow-billed Cuckoo** *Coccyzus americanus*, 4

A **Red-eyed Vireo** and a **Summer Tanager** were found in the theatre - caught and released when light

**Tennessee Warbler** *Oreothlypis peregrina*, 2  
**Barn Swallow**, 1

**Dickcissel** *Spiza americana*, 3

**Prothonotary Warbler** *Protonotaria citrea*, 2

**Black-billed Cuckoo** *Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*, 1, exhausted so put in a sheltered corner

**Myiarchus flycatcher** sp. 1 - annoyingly, it flew off before it could be identified.

**Eastern Kingbird** *Tyrannus tyrannus*, 1

Later a nighthawk *Chordeilinae* sp. (common/lesser, probably) was seen flying high at 08.10 at 8.2N, 78.5W, flying high towards land, 5 nm away. At 09.45 there were still five Red-eyed Vireos and 1 Yellow-green Vireo on board.

Later that day from 22.40–24.00 (rain, thunder and lightning, wind NNE 4 knots, 7.4N, 78.3W, 7 nm offshore, southern Panama) the following birds were on the ship: Black-billed Cuckoo (still sleeping), Grey-breasted Martin *Progne chalybea*, 1 on a wire below the port lifeboat; Red-eyed Vireo, 6; and Summer Tanager, 1 male, 2 females.

Next day there was again 'a blizzard of birds', off northern Colombia, Bahia Solano and evidently a continuation of the above activity. From 02.45–04.00, and 04.30–05.40, there was very heavy rain (Simon had to use wellies out on deck!) and lightning. There were many large, green-bodied dragonflies which also came aboard. Possibly thousands of small passerines flying around the ship again - relatively few landed but the following were recorded on the ship:





Plate 64. Yellow-crowned Night Heron. © S Cook

**Summer Tanager**, 2 males (one was eating one of the dragonflies), 6 females

**Yellow-green Vireo**, 3 (one with a damaged wing but it was impossible to catch it)

**Mourning Warbler** *Geothlypis philadelphia*, 1 adult male

**Dickcissel**, 2

**Red-eyed Vireo**, 10

**Barn Swallow**, 8

**Yellow-crowned Night Heron** *Nyctanassa violacea*, 1 adult on top of glass screens around jacuzzis, see photo

**Northern Waterthrush**, 4

**Brown-chested Martin** *Progne tapera*, 1 wet one, boxed and released successfully later

**Wood-Pewee** sp. 1

**Black-billed Cuckoo** - the tired one had gone from its sheltered spot

**Bell's Vireo** *Vireo bellii*, 1 seen well but not for long

**Scarlet Tanager**, 1 male

**Sand Martin**, 1

**Bay-breasted Warbler** *Setophaga castanea*, 1

**Blackburnian Warbler** *Setophaga fusca*, 1

**Swainson's Warbler** *Limnothlypis swainsonii*, 1 by the jacuzzis.

## Future Sightings

Please keep your landbird sightings flowing through. We will collate, add to the database and publish periodically. Send your records to [data@rnbws.org.uk](mailto:data@rnbws.org.uk). Thank you.

## References

**Woods RW (2017)**. The birds of the Falkland Islands. British Ornithologists' Club, Tring.

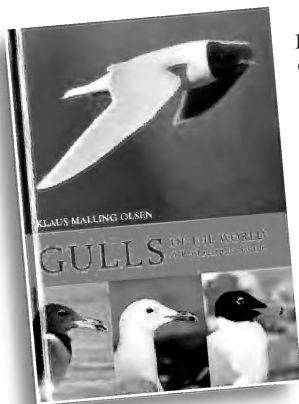
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# Book Review

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**Gulls of the World: A Photographic Guide** by Klaus Malling Olsen. Published by Christopher Helm 2018. Hardback 368 pp, RRP £35.00



In 2004 Klaus Malling Olsen provided us with his very detailed 'Gulls of North America, Europe, and Asia', with artwork by Hans Larsson and numerous photographs. His latest guide has now added 13 southern hemisphere species of gull. The author describes the book as a "photographic companion guide"

to his previous publication. However, it stands alone for comprehensive worldwide coverage of the group.

The book has a 23 page introduction that discusses age, moult and life cycles, geographical influence on moult, colour abnormalities, light effects on plumage, hybrids, hints on identification and a very useful double page with clear illustrations of gull topography and plumage. The designations 'winter' and 'summer' plumage as used in the previous publication are retained. The varying nature of these terms for each species is more closely defined in the text by referring to the range of months each plumage cycle is retained. The Humphrey and Parkes (1959) convention offers a more precise framework for the study of moult and plumage.

The book describes some 61 'species' of gull. The author does not seek to "present an authorised taxonomic update" but "in certain taxa where taxonomy is still unclear or just partly resolved, such recognisable taxa are treated in separate accounts". In divergence from the IOC 8.2 World Bird List there are separate accounts for Steppe, Mongolian, Azores, Baltic, Kamchatka, Thayer's and Red-billed Gull.

Each species account gives a concise description of every age group, notes on

moult, hybridisation, comparison with similar species, status, habitat and distribution and a short list of key references. Clear maps of a generous and readable size show distribution and breeding areas; also dispersal and migration routes where appropriate. All plumages are illustrated by high quality colour photographs labelled with location, month, and attribution. The photographs were taken by the author KMO and enthusiasts from around the world. A quick count showed that the book contains around 930 gull photographs, apparently none repeated from the 2004 book, a splendid effort by the author, contributors and publishers.

This is an excellent book for anyone interested in the identification of gulls in all their varied and often confusing plumages, at sea, along coasts, in harbours or in the fragrant confines of the local rubbish dump.

## References

Humphrey PS & Parkes KC (1959). An approach to the study of moults and plumage. *Auk* 76 p.1–31.

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**Plate 65.** Osprey and HMS *Monmouth*, Mayport, Florida, 7 September 2018. © Lieutenant J Jeffrey